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A Romance of the Western Front

By

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CHAPTER I

MARSEILLES

ISABELLE stood on the quay among a small crowd of people. All had their eyes turned in one direction, to the spot where the mail-boat from Algeria would be first visible. She was due to be alongside at five, and it was already nearly six.

Isabelle had placed herself near two women in mourning—evidently mother and daughter—for they seemed to her a protection among the rather rough-looking crowd around her. No one was allowed on the landing-stage itself since the war (she had learnt that regulation on her own arrival a month before), and those awaiting the boat's arrival stood on a cobbled pavement among mountains of packing-cases. Every now and then she sat down on one; but the people standing in front obscured her view, and she could not resist for more than a minute the force which constrained her to get the first possible glimpse of the *Ville d'Alger*.

She was tired, for she had spent the night in the train and had only arrived at Marseilles from Paris at ten o'clock that morning. All day she had been hurrying between hotel, docks, and the company's offices, asking for details of the ship's arrival and trying to find out the names of the passengers on board. But, as is often the case, they had not been telegraphed in advance. She was not sure whether he would be on board. She

had not had a single letter from him since she had last seen him. Her only clue was the discovery that his Bank was expecting him by this mail, and she had overcome all the difficulties of a sudden flight from Paris and risked the night journey to Marseilles. How would he greet her ? He had not said good-bye to her when she had left Algiers; he had not answered one of her letters; but surely when he found her waiting there on the quay, all misunderstandings and rancour would be swept away ! If only he was on board all would be right.

The Comte de Gaurival *was* on board, and the impatience with which he waited, glasses in hand, at the stern of the boat to catch a first glimpse of the quay was no less than that of Isabelle looking out to sea. He singled her out almost immediately, and she, before the whole boat hove into sight, had made sure that the man in the centre of the little waving group was he for whom she was so eagerly waiting. There was no mistaking his figure, his attitude, and his way of moving. He did not wave, he stood with glasses up, and Isabelle also did not dare to raise her hand. Could he see her distinctly; could he see her eyes ? That would tell him all. Occasionally he turned towards a woman by his side who was evidently chattering to him, but his answers were curt and short, and he continued to gaze through his glasses. Who was this woman ? Isabelle shrank back instinctively into the crowd.

At last the floating platform was roped alongside the ship, and a few officials were running up and down the ladder.

Isabelle isolated herself from the crowd now, for she was certain that de Gaurival had seen her, and she

waited, hidden behind a wooden barrier, till he should pass. She was anxious to avoid running into casual acquaintances from Algiers. She need not have feared that, however, for the first passenger who alighted was de Gaurival himself, and he strode quickly towards the little waiting group, glancing here and there.

"Gauri!" the voice came low and distinct from her hiding-place behind the barrier. In an instant he had found his way round and was by her side.

The eager, hungry, devouring glances which had been interchanged from a distance, and even when the barrier separated them, were suddenly repressed as they found themselves within arms' length of each other. Was it fear of being seen that caused this sudden restraint? They were oblivious of everything in the world but themselves; they were unaware of time and place; they had both travelled a long distance with one idea, one hope—and yet, when they met they both in the same instant armed themselves with apparent indifference and unconcern.

"What are you doing here, Madame, may I ask?" de Gaurival said, shaking hands and speaking as naturally as possible.

"I came to see if there was anybody I knew on board."

"I thought you were in Paris."

"I left last night, and arrived here this morning."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"You came for——" De Gaurival bit his lip at having unawares dropped his light tone and already bared his feelings.

"For you, yes, for you." Isabelle followed his lead

at once, and willingly flung aside all pretence. "In every letter I said to you, 'If I know the day you start, you will find me on the quay at Marseilles awaiting your arrival.' You did not believe me?"

"I was not going to count on you!"

"Why not, Gauri? Do I ever break my promises?"

"I counted on you once and you failed me; it shall never happen again!"

"You mean when I left Algiers. But I never led you to count on me. You know it. When war broke out I expected that every Englishman and every Frenchman would hasten back to his country to fight. Certainly I did not at all understand then what war meant. I thought it was some glorious, magnificent game in which great honours could be gained, and where the stakes were high for the side who won. I was more than astonished when I saw men obtaining exemption for the sake of business. I should never have forgiven my husband, even though an American and a neutral, if he had hesitated to put himself at the disposal of the Allies. He had lived long enough in France to be practically French, his sympathies were wholly French, he was married to me, an Englishwoman, and to him, as to me, these facts were enough to make him throw in his lot with the Allies. But it was not obligatory, and when he decided to return to France to enlist, how could I remain behind? If he had returned for any other reason I would have done so. But it was *you* I wanted to see enlist; it was you I hoped would throw aside all to become a soldier, and when you didn't, and he did, I felt bound to stick by him. If it had been *you* who had left first, it would have been *you* I should have accompanied."

"And left your husband in Algiers?"

"Yes, without a moment's hesitation. Why do you ask? You know I should have. I would have done anything you asked of me in such a case."

"You judge of things in complete ignorance. It was impossible for me to leave my post then. I have had great difficulties, even at the present time, in getting permission to return to France to enlist. You must remember, there are a few men who are more useful out of the army than in it."

"I am beginning to understand that now, and already I had determined to give up begging you to come back. Then I heard you were starting."

"So you think I came back for *you*—to obey you?"

"I think so."

"Well, understand this—that I came back for reasons of my own; that since the day you left Algiers I made up my mind never again to be influenced by you. I intend to trace my own path and shall not again be led from it. If I find you in my path, well and good for me—I shall consider it good luck and be grateful, but that is all. I am no longer to be twisted round your little finger."

"Gauri—what are you saying to me? Don't talk like that. You did not even ask me to stay in Algiers."

"You know I wanted you as much as if I had begged and implored you on my knees. I had waited for weeks and months for such an opportunity as offered itself just then. I had waited patiently, sacrificing myself continually for your pleasure or for your convenience. I was more careful of your reputation than you yourself were. I wanted you alone, apart from others, or not at all. I was in agony, participating in your social functions and seeing you with your friends.

I neglected my own circle, and for your sake I changed my mode of life. Then when the great moment arrived and you could have rewarded me for my devotion, you calmly abandoned me. Everything as it were conspired for the fulfilment of our hopes and desires. Circumstances shaped themselves miraculously to give us liberty, and your husband even advised you to stay behind."

"How could I leave him when he was going to the war? How could I? On a hundred other occasions I might have deserted him, but not then."

"And he is at the front now?"

"No, he has gone to Washington."

"Ah—you see!"

"But how could I know that that would happen? It never entered my head that he would not go to the front. It was not his fault that he did not go, and he was very disappointed. He was told he would be much more useful to France in Washington than as a soldier in the army, and he consented to do what was asked of him."

"And why didn't you accompany him?"

"He did not want me. I begged him to take me but he refused. I don't yet understand why. I made my sacrifice for nothing."

"So now you've come back to me! On an impulse of sacrifice or patriotism you leave me; on an impulse of suspicion or jealousy you return to me. I don't like people of impulses, and they are not to be trusted. Besides, in neither case was it a compliment to me."

"I want you, Gauri."

"Too late. You have shattered the idyll before it was begun."

"I repeat, Gauri, that if you had enlisted and left Algiers before my husband, nothing on earth would have prevented my accompanying you. It broke my heart to leave you. You did not say good-bye to me—you let me go off without a word or a line. All that last night in port waiting to start I lay on deck looking towards your house and tearing my heart out for you. You did not write to me in France, you did not answer one of my letters. Yet though I could not count on you for certain, you find me waiting for you when you arrive. Does not such faith appeal to you? And still more should it touch you, if you could picture all the difficulties I had at leaving Paris for no apparent reason."

"You are free in your movements now?"

"Yes, in a way. But I've made my home with my sister while she is in Paris. Her husband is commanding one of the Battalions of the Sussex Regiment, so she has taken a flat in Paris. Of course she wanted to know why I was coming to Marseilles."

"Well, you'd better hurry back to her."

"Gauri, don't be so bitter. Surely I've made reparation now, even if I did treat you badly. I've come to meet you at the boat."

"Too late."

"What do you mean by 'too late'? Are you still harping on my departure from Algiers? Listen, Gauri—you've come back to be a soldier; you have done what I wanted you to do more than I wanted anything in the world. I will reward you. I will do anything you want. Though as for that the reward will come of itself, for you would have regretted it all your life if you had not taken a part in the war. But anything I can do for you, I will. Say what you like,

you are my recruit. You know the poster? 'If you can't fight yourself, get a recruit.' You are *my* recruit."

This conversation had taken place as they wended their way along the quay through the dock sheds, jostled by rough dockers and loiterers who seemed of every nationality except French. When they reached the dirty, narrow, sordid street behind the docks, they seated themselves in one of a long line of shabby carriages which were waiting fares. They talked on, oblivious of their surroundings, till the garçon waiting for a tip said that all the cabin luggage was in and asked the address.

"Which hotel are you at?" de Gaurival asked Isabelle.

"The Carlton." De Gaurival gave the name to the driver.

After a moment's hesitation Isabelle said:

"Perhaps it would be safer for you to go to another hotel. I have stayed at the Carlton once before, and they know me."

De Gaurival bit his lip and repressed a movement of anger or impatience.

"Drive to the Grand Hotel."

As the springless, broken-down vehicle rattled over the roughly paved, badly lighted road the darkness and noise seemed to shut them off from all the outside world, and they instinctively drew closer. The indignation, which de Gaurival had nursed for months against the woman he loved, melted away suddenly when he found himself alone with her.

They reached the hotel. Isabelle remained in the carriage while de Gaurival ordered his room. When he returned he gave the address of a restaurant on the

Cannebière. They dined as if they were alone in the world. Such a cosmopolitan gathering, representing so many army units and such varied strata of society, would have greatly interested Isabelle at any other moment. But at this crisis in her life the British Cavalry officer with the little French cocotte, the Australian officers so evidently newly landed in Europe, dining alone without female society, and the two wounded chasseurs, passed unnoticed.

For a time Isabelle babbled on happily, telling stories of the war, what she had heard, what she had read, the appearance of Paris, all she had seen during her journey to Marseilles; but de Gaurival was silent, he seemed to listen but did not answer. His eyes when he looked at her burnt her through, and the fever that was in him became contagious. Isabelle felt her head swirl, and once or twice she began a sentence, but her voice dropped and she could not finish it.

At the end of the meal, while she waited for him to finish his liqueur and pay the bill, she felt she could keep still no longer, and wanted to rush into the open air. But de Gaurival revelled in his greater control of himself; he pretended not to notice her impatience—sipped his cognac quietly, lighted his cigar with slow deliberation, sat a whole minute longer when the chasseur was waiting there with his hat and overcoat. He began to ask Isabelle questions, and when she found difficulty in answering, his bearing became even more resolute, and triumph shone in his eyes.

When they came out into the damp street again Isabelle breathed deeply. With the fresh air she began to feel herself again, and when he took her arm in his she did not nestle up to him or yield herself entirely. The cool air had restored her self-possession.

They walked towards the Carlton without speaking, and it was only as they reached the entrance that Gaurival said: "I'm coming in with you."

"Not up to my room?"

"Yes."

"It's not possible!"

"Well, good-night, then."

"Gauri, don't leave me yet. It's quite early; come into the lounge."

"Thank you, but I don't like talking in public places."

"Well, come up to my room for a little while."

"For an hour—to be then driven out again? No."

"Oh, Gauri, don't frighten me. Let's walk a little more."

"Come, then." He again took her arm, and they walked down the Boulevard again. He led her through two small back streets. Suddenly he stopped. "Here is the Grand Hotel. I can get up to my room by a staircase here, without using the lift or going through the hall. Come with me."

"Gauri, I dare not. How long should I stop?"

"All night."

"Oh no, I could not. Gauri, it is impossible, for heaps of reasons. For one, I've got nothing with me, not even a handbag. Then I should have to let my hotel people know. If they found I did not come back they would perhaps be anxious and institute a search for me."

"Nonsense."

"Gauri—not to-night. Do not frighten me."

"I shall not ask you again. I will take you back to your hotel, because it is not fitting for a lady to go

alone through the Marseilles streets at this hour. If you do not want to spend your evening with me, I will try to amuse myself without you. But I will take you back first."

As they retraced their steps, Isabelle talked almost without a pause, so anxious was she to excuse herself. She said she was tired, having passed her last night in the train, and required a good night's rest. She talked of things being dangerous, of things being safe; she made promises of all sorts for the morrow, when she would be rested. She hardly knew what she was saying. Her one almost unconscious desire was that he would force her to give way, unless he could agree with her; but he did not speak. She began to think she had convinced him with all her arguments, when as they reached their destination, he said gravely: "I want a definite answer. You do not wish me to come up with you?" Isabelle answered: "Not to-night."

"Bonsoir."

"Bonsoir."

As soon as Isabelle reached her room she took off her hat and threw herself full-length on the bed. For a minute or two the joy at having found again the man she loved filled her, body and soul, with such satisfaction that she felt she needed nothing further just now, beyond a little time to meditate on the last few hours and to dream of the future. But as she remembered certain words and expressions of his, the silence and quiet of the room suddenly struck her. She raised herself on her elbow and looked at the clock. Not yet ten. Why had he left her so soon? It was quite early. Why, on this greatest of all days in her life, should she be alone? Why had she let him go? She

grew more and more agitated as she remembered his stern and unbroken silence during the last part of their walk in the street. It was his first evening in France for several years, and she had let him spend it alone. She got up and put on her hat.

But where find him now? She could not go to his hotel, nor walk in the streets alone; she did not even dare to leave her bedroom again at such a late hour. There was nothing to be done. She must wait till morning. He was sure to come early. Why had he let her come back to her hotel if he did not wish it? He had seemed to acquiesce in the arrangement. Trying to still her agitation in this way, Isabelle undressed and crept into bed. But she got to sleep very late and woke very early, so that the fear of looking tired and worn after a bad night was added to her other worries. The minutes and hours went slowly by, and at nine o'clock de Gaurival had not yet sent her a message or note, and, unable to still her impatience any longer, Isabelle went downstairs. She sat down in the lounge, took up a paper and watched the door. No sign of him. She would have gone to his hotel, but she feared they might miss each other on the way. At twelve, the hotel hour for lunch, he had still not come.

Isabelle now began to feel herself giving way altogether. Surely he was not going to let her have lunch alone. She had come to Marseilles for him; he knew it, knew where to find her, and was neglecting her without a word of explanation. For the third or fourth time she went to the office to inquire if anyone had asked for her or if any note for her had arrived. Never had a morning been so long. She was now almost beside herself with anxiety and impatience.

She hesitated to write de Gaurival's name and address on an envelope for fear of raising suspicions; but at last in desperation she scribbled a hasty note, and gave it to a chasseur to take to the Grand Hotel.

The answer came back that the Comte de Gaurival was not lunching there, but that he had said he would return to the hotel about three.

Isabelle hardly knew how to keep from bursting into tears as the chasseur gave the message. But after giving herself a few minutes to recover an outward appearance of calm, she went to the restaurant and lunched alone.

At three she sent another note which it had taken her an hour to compose. In ten minutes the answer was brought her. The relief was so great at seeing the familiar handwriting that the blood rushed to her head, and for a few seconds she could neither read nor understand the contents.

"If you wish to see me, come to my hotel and ask for suite twenty-one. I refuse to see you at your hotel or anywhere but in my own quarters. I will wait in for you till six, but if you do not come I shall take the night train to Paris.—GAURI."

Isabelle tugged at her watch. Half-past three. In less than half an hour she could be there. She had not a second's hesitation. What if they had come together, only to lose each other again, and this time for ever! Isabelle was convinced that this was a final message, and did not for a moment doubt that he would keep his word. With feverish eagerness she put on her hat, and with equally rapid and determined movements she put her room in order and locked the

door. In five minutes she was walking composedly downstairs and leaving the hotel. Out of sight of the hotel porter she hailed a carriage and drove to the Grand. She walked unhesitatingly up the steps and asked for suite twenty-one. Would they ask her name or question her? No, a chasseur immediately led the way, and at the end of a passage knocked at a door. She heard "Come in." The chasseur opened the door, Isabelle walked in, and he closed it behind her.

De Gaurival was writing, his back turned. "Gauri, I've come. Gauri, I've come." She kept repeating the same words over and over again and could say nothing else. Once, later in the evening, after they had finished dinner, which de Gaurival had had served in the little sitting-room, he said to her. "You did mean to stay with me, then, this time?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you did."

"Oh, perhaps. I don't remember," Isabelle answered. She was in reality in a sort of dream. It never entered her head to reproach de Gaurival for his neglect of her; nor for the hardness of his letter, nor for his threat to leave the town when she had come there on purpose to meet him. She remembered nothing but her terror at having so nearly lost him. This one fact filled all her mind, and the only words that reached her lips, sometimes uttered in an exhausted sigh, sometimes with triumphant joy in her own submission, were always the same: "Gauri, I've come." Even during her sleep, as she turned on the pillow, de Gaurival heard her again: "It's me, I've come."

But for de Gaurival himself there was little sleep that night. He had won her for a time; he knew his

influence over her was very strong; but could he hold her? He was beginning to understand. He had a growing instinct that to succeed he must be hard and uncompromising, that to allow her again to triumph over his will as she had that time in Algiers would be fatal. She had a strong will, and a woman's power of getting her own way; but he would prove that he had a stronger; he would, above all, never again allow her to trample on his pride. Ah! there was the sting! She had wounded him in the most sensitive part of his nature, and it must never under any circumstances happen again.

Yet as he looked at the piquant little face surrounded by the disorderly wisps of curly fair hair, he felt very tender and pitiful in his strength. But he knew there must be no weakness, no yielding in the line he took. Too much gentleness and kindness might be misconstrued. She admired strength. Could he be blamed for his attitude? It was she herself who had pointed the way!

Himself trained in a school of exceptional hardness by parents whose mode of life was as stern and rigid as were their principles, he had grown up proud, reserved, and of an intense sensitiveness. He was a man of few friends, and although women attracted him, he had a slight contempt for them which was, however, hidden under a correct attitude and extremely polite manners. The fascination he exercised over women was partly due to their desire to know what lay beneath this impassive exterior—a desire which none succeeded in satisfying. But to this woman he had bent, to her he had opened out, to her he had been ready to submit if need be. He had idealized her—she was not in any category of womankind he

had known previously. She was like a light shining in the darkness, and of all women it was she who had rebuffed him! and so cruelly! Could he ever, ever forget or forgive? Dare he? His deep grey eyes assumed their most steely expression and his dark face in its framework of black hair seemed to take on even a deeper shade, as he pondered over past events. The face was a handsome one, with regular features and a fine contour, and was the heritage of an ancient, noble line, while a certain ruggedness proclaimed his Basque descent.

And she? What was it in her that had aroused such passion in this undemonstrative man? Here was not the profile of a pretty young girl: the well-shaped nose, the full, red lips, the firm chin, were those rather of a resolute woman, one who was sure of herself and her ambitions. Was it the witchery of her golden hair, its luxuriance, and the wonderful freshness of her complexion?

They made her look very youthful certainly for a woman of twenty-eight. The lines of her figure, too, were noble, refined, and of just proportions, and had been healthily developed by all manner of outdoor sports, such as English girls love. Was it these outward things? He allowed they played a very large part. But no: it was a certain subtle complexity of character that *kept* him attracted. It puzzled and swayed and held him. She combined with the waywardness and emotionalism of a child a wonderful frankness and openness of manner. At times a sovereign will animated her whole being and shone out in her eyes, and, though this was a sure index of future storms, yet it exhaled for him a charm to which he felt he might in spite of himself one day

yield. Yet if he did, would she not again tread his pride under foot? Ah! he must be adamant!

He fell asleep at last, tender, angry, masterful in turn, but very determined to be on his guard come what might.

CHAPTER II

FROM CIVILIAN TO SOLDIER

THE lovers stayed on three days more at Marseilles, which were spent in walking or driving about the town, watching the varied aspects and the life of the port. They visited the Hindoo camp, and watched the Sikhs and Gurkhas lighting their fires and cooking their meals in the open air. They went to the British artillery camp and admired the horses and their equipment. They wandered about the port, noting with interest the conglomeration of all the nationalities assembled there, more numerous and picturesque than ever since the war.

Almost it seemed as if it had all been arranged for their special amusement and pleasure. Neither of them had yet been touched by the cruelty, horror, and hardships of the war.

The realities of their position were rarely brought home to them. Once or twice Isabelle caught de Gaurival's arm, saying: "That man stared at me! Do you think he knows me?" and for a few minutes she would put a little distance between herself and him, and walk as if they were strangers.

They left for Paris one evening, and tasted the new pleasure of travelling alone together for some twenty hours. The tiny little *wagon-lit* compartment was a palace to them, for they felt themselves even more isolated from the rest of the world than in the hotel.

Isabelle had intended going straight to her sister's flat on arriving in Paris, but on de Gaurival's insisting that she might just as well spend the day with him and go to her sister's later, she accompanied him to his hotel. She consented all the more willingly as she knew her sister was going to Rouen for the week-end to visit her husband.

In the evening de Gaurival, after dining on the Boulevard, took her to the Olympia. They were less interested in the show itself, than in the huge artistic and well-executed recruiting advertisements which adorned the lounge. For a long minute they stood in front of the legend, " If you cannot fight yourself, get a recruit," and Isabelle pressed the arm which held hers.

On coming out of the overheated atmosphere into the cold damp night, Isabelle shivered. De Gaurival instantly suggested that she must have something hot to drink, that it was stupid to return to a flat where there was no one to look after her, and that she would do better to return to his hotel. Isabelle at first refused, and they started towards the Rue de Bouclier; then she begged him not to walk so fast; then she asked him to stand still a moment while she thought quietly. After again continuing their walk, Isabelle finally pulled her companion's arm and said: " I'm coming back to your hotel with you." Whether it was the remembrance of that evening at Marseilles that decided her, or whether she concluded that the risks were less than she at first imagined, she could not herself have said.

Tired though she was, they had to return the whole distance on foot, for there was not a taxi to be had. Isabelle's fatigue resulted in her waking up with a chill the next morning. Such a trifle would have been

borne with the greatest equanimity had there not been another blow in store.

A telegram arrived from de Gaurival's father, saying: "The military police came to fetch Henri this afternoon." Henri was himself. So, then, he ought already to be in uniform! His name must have been telegraphed from Marseilles to his depot at Bayonne, and already the military authorities were seeking for him. De Gaurival's heart sank within him. What a downfall to all his hopes! He had not been in France for two years, he had not yet seen his parents, he had just won the woman he loved and was about to spend a few blissful days alone with her in Paris. Was this fateful telegram to upset everything? Why must he give up his liberty just when his chance had come to enjoy the things for which he had waited so long and patiently? For a minute he hesitated, half determined that nothing should snatch from him the next few days, but seeing Isabelle's eyes fixed on the telegram, he handed it to her. This sealed his fate. Pride came to his aid and decided him. Never would he let her know that he had the least hesitation in carrying out in its entirety the programme he had made. Nothing should betray her power over him in the slightest degree.

"I must go to Bayonne to-day. I shall send a telegram to say I am coming."

"To-day! Not to-day, Gauri! Not so soon as that!"

"I expect I ought to have gone there direct from Marseilles."

"Did not you ask for a month's leave?"

"Yes, but it was refused. All the same, I did not think I would have to join up so quickly. They might

give me breathing space, considering I came back to France of my own free will and need never have been called up at all!"

"Is there no one you can appeal to in Paris?"

"I will go and see General Cortes at the Invalides, whom I know slightly—though it is doubtful if he can do anything for me. Stay here quietly; I shall be back in an hour or so."

De Gaurival returned about midday. If he was at heart disappointed and depressed, he did not show it. The General had looked at his papers with kindly interest, and had explained that by rights he ought to have joined his depot direct from Marseilles. When he saw de Gaurival's consternation he consulted with his secretary, and signed a statement by which "the soldier de Gaurival" need not present himself at his depot before January 2. That gave him his New Year's Day in Paris. De Gaurival was truly grateful; it meant that he had another twenty-four hours with Isabelle, and that he would join his depot with his papers in order, instead of perhaps being punished at the outset of his soldier's career.

Isabelle, hearing all the details of the interview, spoke no more of returning to the flat that day—nothing should separate her from her lover during his last hours of liberty. She would not even mar them by tears or fuss. Time enough to cry when he had left her.

The day passed in a sort of dream. Isabelle could never afterwards remember clearly what they did; she had fleeting visions of the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne with the sun on them, of the splendid Arc de Triomphe, at which she gazed with a dreamy vision of a Bayonne regiment returning victoriously from the

war and marching proudly beneath it, of shops where they bought all the necessaries appertaining to the soldier.

In the evening they discussed the idea of Isabelle's accompanying de Gaurival to Bayonne, but it had to be given up, for Isabelle, who had been languid all day, was beginning to feel really ill. Her temperature was high and every limb ached. In the morning she was a little better, but could do no more than watch de Gaurival moving about the room, busy with his preparations for departure. She made him put all his belongings on the bed, and she handled them fondly before they disappeared inside his trunks.

In the late afternoon he decided he must take her to her sister's house. He helped her to dress, and supported her downstairs and to the waiting taxi. She wanted him to come up in the lift to the flat and take her as far as her sister's door—she even tried to persuade him to seize this opportunity, while her sister was away, to come in for a minute and see where she lived; but he refused absolutely, and only consented to wait in the street till he should see the lights shine out in the windows she had pointed out to him. He would then know she had arrived safely and all was well.

When she hurriedly crossed her bedroom and opened a window a few minutes later, the taxi was just giving its first bound forward.

Two days later she received a letter from de Gaurival.

"BIARRITZ,"
4, 1, 1915.

"CHÈRE MADAME,

"How are you? I have no news of you, and yesterday wished to telegraph to you—but I suppose it is safer not. Will you reassure me by a telegram. Quickly, please.

"I am here sitting over the fire at my mother's house. She is busy with my clothes and uniform, etc. It is raining outside; it is raining everywhere.

"I had an awful journey from Paris—the train was crowded with officers. I could only lie down in the corridor where, like a good old colonial as I am, coming from Africa, I caught a violent cold, which gave me a feverish night. The next day to Bayonne—saw Olivier—went to the recruiting station, where I showed my papers and proved that I was *en règle*. No leave possible. The military police will be sent to-morrow with my mobilization order. I shall have to enter the Bayonne barracks, immediately after receiving it. I am expecting them, therefore, this evening, and shall doubtless join up to-morrow.

"Yesterday lovely weather. Beach beautiful as ever; few visitors—practically only foreigners or refugees.

"Biarritz has become a military town. The most palatial hotels, the Casino and the Carlton, have been turned into hospitals; the beautiful, wide terraces are crowded with wounded or convalescent soldiers. It is an extraordinary sight.

"My cold is at its height—that and the rain are enough to disgust one with life. But it doesn't matter. It is of you I want news, and to know if your fever has gone down and if your cold is better.

"I saw Dr. Perrin at the Café of Bayonne. It appears that they are very severe and strict in this region just now, and that it is useless to ask for anything. I don't; but all the same, if I am forced to sleep in this weather on the bare ground or on a straw mattress, I cannot escape a return of malarial fever. Oh, well—we shall see. I shall know to-morrow what

they mean to do with me. Tell me what you are doing with yourself.

"I take my leave of you, with excuses for this brief and scrappy letter. I have not the heart to do anything or to wish anything; my brain is numbed by my cold. Write to me, I beg of you."

No sooner had Isabelle read this letter than she came to a determination. She would follow him to Biarritz. She was much better and quite capable of travelling, and if she wanted to go at all she must leave before her sister's return, to avoid explanations and making false statements.

The day she started she received a telegram telling her not to come, for they could not meet, and that she was to go quietly to England. Isabelle would not be deterred, however; her ticket was taken, her arrangements made, and she climbed into her couchette as soon as the train left the Quai d'Orsay station, with the firm hope of finding de Gaurival the next day.

But no blue-clad French soldier met her at the station, and she had to choose an hotel and to face alone hotel servants and officials.

She dared ask no questions, for she knew neither the number of his regiment nor company, and it was thus quite impossible to get information without going into long explanations. She therefore determined to wait quietly till de Gaurival could know she was there and join her. For two days she wandered about the shore, examining every rock, every corner of the cliffs and beach, following every winding path, visiting the Plage des Basques, the Chambre d'Amour, the Virgin of the Rocks. What a country! What a beautiful country! She had longed to know this part of France because it

was de Gaurival's birthplace, and she would have found things to admire in the most unattractive landscape for that reason. But this combination of sea and mountain, this mingling of pines and well-tended gardens, this blue sea and bright green grass, all the beauties of such a country would have fascinated Isabelle even if they had been in no way connected with Gauri. She began to love the place for itself. Why had Gauri not told her more of its wonders and delights? Perhaps he had hoped to show it her and surprise her with its glory. She knew it could not be that he did not appreciate it. She felt she began to understand her lover better. This mingling of savage and sentimental in the Basque country had been grafted into the Basque nature. Gauri was the outcome of his natural surroundings. The beauty of the sun on the sea, the wrath of the waves on the rocks, were both represented in his character.

The third day after her arrival in Biarritz Isabelle was returning from a walk she had taken towards Bayonne, and was nearing the hotel, when she was seized with the desire to see once again the sunset over the sea from the High Rock. For ten minutes she stood spell-bound, watching the changing colours on sky and sea, and she felt uplifted by the wonderful sight. As she turned to go, she noticed that other people had come to the spot with the same object as herself, but not like herself, alone; all were in couples, and Isabelle's momentary ecstasy was turned into jealousy and despair. Why was Gauri not with her? Why were *they* not arm in arm, enjoying together all this beauty?

As soon as she entered the hotel a chasseur gave her two letters. Gauri at last! The blood rushed

to her head so that the words were all blurred. The first she opened had been sent on from her Paris address.

"BIARRITZ,"
8, 1, 1915.

"CHÈRE AMIE,

"I have just telegraphed to you to say that *you must not come* here. It is impossible. You could not reach me.

"Incorporated this morning into the 442nd Colonial, 13th Co., Matricule 5000, I have just passed my first day in muddle and dirt. Ah, I've done well for myself! I am in the same barracks where I was eighteen years ago. The Citadelle!

"The Colonial doctor who examined me this morning of course declared me good for the 'service armé,' after having sounded my heart and lungs. To him my fourteen years in the tropics counted as nothing!

"I am in the midst of a crowd of young fellows of the 1891 and 1892 classes who have not yet got their uniforms. My company leaves to-morrow, during the night, for the camp of Ramadet, near Hamau, seventy or eighty kilometres from Bayonne. It is some out-of-the-way village, and I do not know how we shall be billeted. It appears we go there to guard German prisoners.

"At four o'clock I escaped from the barracks to come here, get a wash—at last—and dine near a fire. I slept a little, and packed a few necessaries into as small a parcel as possible; for I must tie it to my pack, which I have to carry on my back like the other men. And there I am!

"You do not wish me, do you, to explain that all this is not exactly rosy? I will therefore say nothing and keep to myself what I think.

"Fortunately I found among the non-coms. some old Biarritz friends, but they can do nothing for me. It is obvious they cannot hand me on their stripes, and I therefore enter the ranks and also my shell.

"Finished, then, our beautiful days! If I had remained in Bayonne I would have asked you to come, but where I am going it is not possible. It would be madness. Give up, therefore, at once, any idea of coming in this direction. I *forbid* you absolutely. Stay a few days in Paris thinking of me, and then make off quickly, as soon as possible, to England, to your parents, where you may expect further news of me.

"Give me your address in England, and write to me *always here* at Biarritz—from where your letters can be easily forwarded.

"Do not complicate my life, which is hard enough just now. See, I am already no longer myself and do not know how to write. And I must write two or three more letters. And to-morrow morning at six-thirty, back to Bayonne. Do not let all this prevent you from writing to me from time to time. And when I can see things a little more clearly in my new situation, so paralyzing at first, I will also write to you.

"I am well in spite of my cold, and in spite of all that I do not wish to say to you. You are well again, you are free, comfortable, and clean; *then never complain.*

"Be happy, for you and for me. Adieu."

Isabelle's heart sank within her. This letter showed that not only he could not come to her, but that she must not make an attempt to see him. He asked her not to complicate his life. His spirits were at their

lowest ebb; she read sadness, almost despair, between the lines. She thought tremblingly of the letters she had written twice a day since her arrival in Biarritz, begging him to arrange this or that. In the last she had said she would leave Biarritz the following Tuesday if she had not heard from him before then. Had he not enough to bear without her making things still worse for him? And so she had missed him at Biarritz by twenty-four hours! She already saw herself taking the train back to Paris, when she opened the other letter. It was from his camp in the Landes. As she read she felt faint. The sudden change from hopelessness to grateful delight was almost too much for her.

"HAMAU,"
13, 1, 1915.

"MA CHÈRE AMIE,

"I have just telegraphed to you (here the telegraph works, and it is being repaired on the Ramadet line) to tell you to come and see me at once over here. I came here this morning from Ramadet, carrying an order from the C.O. to the station-master at Hamau. Nine kilometres in the pines! At liberty and on my bicycle. How delightful it was! Why were you not on the road? This country reminds me so much of Dalaminus.

"Come. I have engaged a room for you at the Hotel du Chapon Fin at Hamau, and have told you to bring a bicycle. I will come *to-morrow, Sunday, about twelve o'clock*, on the chance of finding you. If you cannot manage it, come later, informing me by letter at Ramadet of your arrival at Hamau, where I can always come in the evening.

"Afterwards you will find out for yourself how to get nearer to Ramadet, where I am much more free than I thought I should be, thanks to having joined

the Cyclist Corps. Come, then, if you really want to see me, and come quickly during this splendid weather.

" If you do not show yourself too much and do not lodge in the camp of Ramadet itself, I could easily come and see you, and everything will go right, I hope.

" I await a letter, or you.

" GAURI.

" P.S. Received this morning three letters from you, read quickly before starting, but which I am looking forward to reading better under the pines in a moment."

CHAPTER III

HIS CAMP IN THE LANDES

When Isabelle looked up from reading this second letter she found the chasseur who had handed her mail to her still standing by. How long had they both been standing thus? Was it really only a few minutes since she returned to the hotel? She had been transported into two worlds since then, the world of despair and the world of hope.

She asked if no telegram had come for her. De Gaurival spoke of having wired. No, there was no wire; but this did not worry Isabelle, for she had all the information she required. She asked the chasseur to look out her trains for her immediately, demanded her bill, and hurried out into the town again. Gauri had told her to bring a bicycle, and she had only a few minutes before the shops would be closed.

On her return to the hotel the chasseur was ready with information as to trains, etc. She must start at six-thirty next morning and change three times, for it was a very complicated cross-country journey. She dined quickly, went to her bedroom and began to pack. So fearful was she of missing her train that she hardly slept, and at five she was up again.

It was a cold but dry morning. The days were still short, and it was quite dark when she left her room just before six. She had to grope her way into the hotel bus, and the chasseur and other hotel servants

waiting round the door for tips looked like spectres. It was the first time Isabelle had ever been alone to an hotel, and this matter of tips troubled her greatly, even though her mind was set on other things.

She changed trains at Dax without difficulty, but when she reached St. Sever she found she could get no further until the afternoon. And Gauri had fixed their rendezvous for lunch at Hamau at twelve! On inquiry, however, she found it was only some ten kilometres by road, so she determined to drive. There was a little bus waiting, which was already full of women going to church and market, but she managed to squeeze into it, and the wretched, overburdened horse started the long climb up to the village.

The women were dropped one by one at this or that street corner, and at the Place there only remained one other woman with her daughter. Isabelle peered out at the church, up the broad steps of which, women and girls in their Sunday best were making their way, to disappear from view through its dark doors. Groups of young men in Basque caps were gossiping here and there on the Place, and at the same time watching those entering the church. The girls, fully conscious of the eyes turned upon them, talked together with as much unconcern as they could assume, but each one was thinking of the meeting that would take place after Mass, and of what she would say or do.

At the garage, where the bus stopped, Isabelle discovered that the woman and her daughter, still seated beside her, were also desirous of hiring a conveyance. She would rather have been alone, and she was nervous, too, of talking to strangers, who might be curious and ask her questions. But she decided, nevertheless, to

offer to share a carriage with them, for it was improbable that there would be two available.

After what seemed an eternity, a bargain was concluded; a small brake was brought round, and the three women got in. Isabelle's registered luggage had gone on by train, and she only had with her a leather suitcase. This her two companions examined curiously, and then in turn her umbrella, her stick, and her little silver handbag. They did all they could to find out where she was going, and Isabelle, after several times evading the question, realized that it was she who would first reach her destination and that they would therefore see for themselves. It was useless, therefore, to maintain silence on that point, and, with an effort, she at last mentioned the Hotel du Chapon Fin. What a name! What sort of an hotel was it with a name like that? She had expected to see surprise and disapproval in their faces, but they remained impassive, and asked in which street it was. The driver, who listened to all conversation and put in a word here and there, said, "Je le connais moi, je le connais," and Isabelle was thus spared giving an answer.

"Chapon Fin!" "Chapon Fin!" How many hundreds of times had she not whispered these words since her letter arrived the evening before! Was it there she would really meet her lover? She dared not picture their meeting. She must not think of it in case it did not come true. It seemed to her that some catastrophe must surely happen to prevent their reunion at the last minute. He had told her to meet him at midday, it is true, but if he looked out the trains again he would find there was not one arriving before four, and then, perhaps, instead of going to the

hotel he might go to the station. Not finding her, he would return to camp. All and every complication that might arise passed through her head, and she did not know how to curb her impatience. Every time the horse slackened its pace she felt she could sit still no longer. They were going through the Landes, and Isabelle was charmed by the country—here the little pine-woods—there the undulating pasture-land. She noticed primroses on the banks at each side of the road, and remembered with a pang of disappointment the little bunch she had brought so carefully from Biarritz in a basket. Gauri would laugh at her flowers now—he who had been living among primroses for over a week.

Oh, Gauri! Oh, Gauri!—she wanted to shout his name.

At last a village came into view at the bottom of a long straight hill. Here was Hamau. Isabelle's heart beat faster than ever. What should she say when she arrived at the hotel? Must she mention Gauri's name or her own if he was not there? There were soldiers here, wandering about in twos and threes among the villagers. Gauri would now be like one of them. She tried to read the number on their collars, to see if they belonged to his regiment. How would she like Gauri dressed like that?

Suddenly the brake stopped, and Isabelle, looking up and down the building, distinguished "Hotel du Chapon Fin" on the stonework portal over the door. Was this an hotel? The word "hotel" had always been associated in her mind with a large detached building with steps leading up to a porch, or some sort of distinctive entrance. This hotel was externally a house, similar in appearance to the others in the village

street. Isabelle jumped down, however, opened the door, and walked in. The narrow passage was empty, and she entered a room on the left. Three men in Basque caps were sitting at a small round iron table with glasses of beer in front of them. There were other small tables near, also a long wooden table, and at the far end a big kitchen stove. The room was evidently a kitchen and bar combined. Isabelle was walking out again at the sight of the three men, when a woman entered from the other end and came towards her.

" Je voudrais parler au Comte de Gaurival."

" Je ne connais personne de ce nom."

Isabelle, filled with misgivings, explained she was to meet him there. Had no room been engaged for her ?

Suddenly the woman's face cleared. Yes, yes, she remembered now that a soldier had come in and had engaged a room for his wife whom he was expecting—but he had not mentioned which day.

Isabelle had blushed deeply at the word " wife," but she simply asked to see the room engaged for her.

It was a large whitewashed room with one small double bed, a tiny washhand-stand with a microscopic jug and basin, a rickety cupboard and two chairs. The furniture mattered little in her eyes; what troubled Isabelle was that there was only one small window for this large room, and that one to the north, so that the sun never entered. The room was like a vault, and an entire contrast to the warm, sunny atmosphere outside. She made no comment, however, and the woman went downstairs.

Would Gauri come ? It was twelve o'clock. What if he had been prevented from leaving camp ? She

ought to have waited, perhaps, till she could have let him know by letter that she was arriving. Was his camp far off? She must ask no questions in the inn—above all she must not make herself conspicuous. She must appear to think everything natural. Where should she have lunch if Gauri did not come? What she had seen of the rooms downstairs did not inspire confidence.

She sat down on one of the cane-bottomed chairs, drawing it near the window in the hope that some of the warmth from outside would reach her there. The street was nearly empty now, for all were engaged on their Sunday midday meal. A few soliders were strolling along, having already finished their "soupe." Suddenly Isabelle perceived a figure in red breeches, dark blue tunic and gaiters, cycling full-speed down the hill. He stopped just below her window, and putting his cycle against the wall he entered the inn. It was Gauri.

In a second he was up the stairs, had opened the door, and was striding across the room towards her in his heavy soldier's boots. Isabelle's heart stood still. Was this the spick-and-span, correctly dressed man she had known in Algiers? Was this the Gauri she had gone to meet in Marseilles? She recovered herself immediately, but spoke to him with shy politeness, as though he were almost a stranger. De Gaurival was perplexed for a minute at Isabelle's attitude, but though somewhat at a loss to understand her, he used to the utmost the tact always at his command to please a woman. He talked and questioned, he laughed and flattered, till Isabelle fell as of old under the charm of his manner and conversation, which had so fascinated her when she had first known him. In that cold, un-

comfortable bedroom, in his uncouth, ill-fitting garments, he conquered her for the second time.

During lunch, which Gauri had had prepared for them in a small sitting-room downstairs, the enchantment continued, and when, the meal finished, they settled down in front of the fire, they had recovered their old intimacy, as though it had never been broken.

Later they went for a walk. Isabelle followed some thirty yards behind Gauri till they were outside the village. There she joined him again, and they went into a wood, where they lay down at ease under the pines. Gauri described to Isabelle the first awful days in barracks: the muddle and the dirt; how he could neither eat nor sleep in such discomfort and in such close proximity with others; how the last day in Bayonne his leave from barracks had been stopped because his hair was too long, and how, furious, he had climbed on to a roof, jumped a wall, and escaped to Biarritz, risking severe punishment. He explained that now, having joined a Cyclist Corps, he had more liberty, and was able to choose his own quarters for sleeping and eating. In Ramadet he had taken a room in a small house in the main street of the village.

"I thought at first of arranging that you should come direct there," continued Gauri, "but as no wives are allowed, and you would have been noticed at once there, I gave it up."

"But I am so far away."

"Yes, too far, and I propose that you should bicycle to Ramadet to-morrow and look at some rooms in a house outside the village. The sister of the woman with whom I lodge will take you there. She says

they are very nice. I have not had time to see them myself."

"All right, I will cycle back with you to-morrow."

"Oh, but I must go back to camp this evening."

But when they returned to the Chapon Fin and were once more alone, de Gaurival brusquely changed his mind, and said:

"I think it will be time enough if I cycle back to-morrow morning; but I must start at five."

This he did, and Isabelle followed some few hours later, guided by the plan of the village of Ramadet, which Gauri had made, so that she could come direct to the house where he lodged without asking her way.

It was a ten-kilometre ride, and though Isabelle thoroughly enjoyed it, for the road was good and the country picturesque, she had been so long unused to cycling that she arrived tired out.

The position and situation of the village as she neared it charmed and delighted her, but she seemed to be leaving it on her right, and said regretfully to herself: "What a pity Gauri is not billeted here!" But just then the road gave a sudden twist and took her straight in, and lo and behold! it was indeed Ramadet. Cycling through the village street she saw Gauri among a group of soldiers, but as pre-arranged, she gave no sign of recognition, and even Gauri himself was deceived and wondered whether she had seen him. She found the dyer's house, where he lodged, quite easily, and Gauri joined her there almost immediately. He was a little vexed that she had arrived so late, for it was now impossible to go and see the rooms at the Villa Madeleine before lunch.

Finding that no meal could be given them on the

premises, Gauri went off to see what could be arranged elsewhere. He was soon back, and Isabelle, keeping well behind, followed him to the village inn, and here they were soon seated at a little table in one of the bedrooms. Gauri had been extremely lucky to find an empty bedroom, for all the courtyard and all the rooms downstairs were crowded with soldiers. Isabelle felt as though in a dream, so novel was each succeeding situation. Their meal was brought up in bits by a fourteen-year-old girl who forgot something each time she climbed the stairs. Isabelle nevertheless found everything perfect, and proposed that they should engage this big double-bedded room without further search.

"We should have no privacy at all. Each time you went downstairs, each time you went near the window, you would be seen by soldiers. And to eat in one's bedroom is always very uncomfortable."

Gauri sent Isabelle back to the dyer's house alone, and from there, a little dismayed at so much responsibility, she started off with her cicerone to visit the Villa Madeleine. It was a twenty-minutes walk to the house, which was a large, isolated red-brick building some hundred yards off the highroad.

They went across the little front garden and knocked at the door. It was opened by a woman of about fifty, and Isabelle's companion immediately began negotiations.

Madame Duvet explained that they had never taken lodgers before, but they would be quite willing to do so.

A younger woman—Madame Duvet's daughter—now joined her mother, and seemed quite pleased with the idea. Her husband was at the front, and he, having been the principal worker on the farm, they were

probably glad to earn a little money in another direction.

When Isabelle saw the front bedrooms, which were large, airy, and sunny, she was delighted. They were a great contrast to her bedroom at the Chapon Fin. The family only occupied the kitchen and the two back bedrooms. It was a little surprising that with such a nice house the best bedrooms should be left empty, but the truth was that they were hardly yet used to such a fine house, and felt more at home in the smaller rooms. Monsieur Duvet had built this villa on his farm as a dot for his daughter, and when she married, the parents, as is often the case in France, continued to live with her. Fortunately M. Duvet was still hale and hearty, for in the absence of his son-in- law the management of the farm had again devolved on him.

Isabelle was also shown a downstairs sitting-room where they could have their meals, as it was never used by the family.

Everything seemed most satisfactory; it was a really comfortable house, and the women were anxious to please; it was in pretty country; and, what was far more precious than all the rest, they would here enjoy perfect privacy. There were no soldiers to come in and out, it was too far from the village; no neighbours to pry; and not even passers-by could see them, for they were off the highroad.

Isabelle was so delighted that she came to terms at once, and said she would arrive with her luggage the next afternoon.

De Gaurival approved of all she had done, but said little, for he was annoyed at her long absence.

"You will not be back at Hamau before dark, and I can't accompany you."

"Never mind. I'm not afraid. We could not be any quicker. It is a long walk to the Villa Madeleine."

"I don't see how you can sleep here."

"I don't want to. I've got none of my things. I'm ready to start now."

"Go on in front. I'll catch you up just outside the village at the cross-roads."

Isabelle had to ride slowly down the high street, for soldiers blocked the way everywhere. They were loitering about waiting for their "soupe," which would be brought by two of their number in huge saucepans from one of the military kitchens. Many had improvised tables in the open air; others ate in the barns where they slept, for they were divided up into sections of from ten to thirty, and lodged in barns and out-houses.

Gauri made Isabelle ride so fast that she almost longed for him to turn back and let her go at her own pace. But he did not take his leave of her till she was only a mile from Hamau.

The next morning she went shopping; she bought a spirit-lamp, a few groceries, fruit, and a knitted cap which she thought would be useful for cycling.

She was too tired to do the ride again, so decided that, as she had to have a carriage in any case for her luggage, she would drive.

On leaving the Chapon Fin, hoping to keep secret her new address she simply said "Ramadet" to the old and wizened driver. But on reflection she recognized that the ruse was quite worthless.

On the road she passed a whole battalion of men resting by the roadside, and not wishing to be seen she put up her umbrella; but the soldiers made jocular remarks and tried to look under her umbrella, so she put it down and faced them boldly.

When she had put things a little straight in the Villa Madeleine she walked along the road to meet Gauri. She sat down on the edge of a little wood and waited. She fixed her eyes on the top of the hill, and when she saw a cycle she came out on to the road. Putting on his brakes to the fullest extent he stopped in the middle of the hill and jumped off at her side.

"You have come to meet me."

"Yes, I was afraid, when I arrived and did not find you there, that perhaps you did not know the way to the Villa."

"I shall never be free before five."

They walked along together, his arm round her.

"There's the house; there's *our* home."

He looked to where she pointed, and said, "Come."

She babbled on for a little while, relating every detail of every minute since she had left him the day before, all her fears, surprises, all she had said and done. But he was not listening, no details could penetrate his mind while it was so absorbed by the one great fact of her presence. Her voice was soothing to his ear, but it was impossible for him to understand or take in what she was saying. Isabelle was gradually drawn under the same spell, so powerful was the feeling of the man by her side. Her chatter became disconnected, then ceased, and it was in silence that they entered the house and she showed him the way to their rooms.

CHAPTER IV

A MOTOR EXCURSION

THEN came three months which seemed to both a beautiful living dream. Their passion was heightened by their isolation from the world and its commonplace routine. They were both keenly alive to the influence of nature, and here there was nothing to separate them from all the joys and glories of a European spring. Since their childhood neither had passed a spring in the depths of the country, and this coming to life of leaves and flowers seemed to them miraculous. The beauty of their surroundings quickened their senses, and their quickened senses enabled them to see in all around new wonders and delights invisible before.

Every morning Gauri had to be off at six, but Isabelle dozed on till Madame Brun brought her her coffee and toast at eight. Even then she did not get up at once, but read or wrote in bed, or still more often gazed out of the window on the sunlit fields. She could see a corner of a wood which was beginning to clothe itself in tender green, and every day she carefully noted its progress. Part of the village of Ramadet was also visible on the hilltop beyond, and she wondered every morning which was the roof which sheltered her lover. It was a typical view of the Landes country, and the calm soothing beauty of the green undulating fields was a continual pleasure to her. During these long idle mornings alone she would go over in her mind all

that Gauri and she had said to each other, all they had felt. With no social or family duties to occupy her, she gave herself up to meditation, and her face reflected at these times the perfect satisfaction and repose she felt. At rare intervals she trembled, but it was not that she feared anything definite—she only feared such happiness and peace could not last.

When she was dressed, she would arrange fresh vases of flowers in their dining-room and bedroom, picking them in the hayfields or hedges, or from the garden.

At eleven she rode out to meet Gauri, and there, at the foot of a greak oak, she waited half hidden till he should arrive.

It was the spot she had chosen on the day of her arrival at the villa, and it remained her favourite resting-place. Before settling down she would sometimes pick bunches of primroses or anemones or long trails of ivy. These she would tie on her cycle, or sometimes adorn herself with them, fastening them in her hat, her belt, or her blouse.

Sometimes she would pick just one flower of each sort—one violet, one bedstraw, one ground-ivy, one marsh-marigold, and so on, to teach Gauri the names in English and French.

They would stroll back together or, if he was late, race back on their machines. In the afternoon Gauri had to return to the orderly room, and Isabelle would take a rug and books and lie down lazily in the wood close by. Though it was only early spring, this corner of the country was so sheltered from winds, so continually bathed in sun, that it was always possible to stay long hours in the open air. Isabelle had found a corner where she was surrounded by golden bushes of

broom. She often slept for an hour, her head pillowed on the soft dry leaves. If Gauri was free at four, they would go for a bicycle ride, exploring the country, penetrating into other woods than their own. All was joy. Sometimes they bathed in a little stream not far from the Villa Madeleine, but so entirely away from the beaten track, and so screened by bushes and trees, that they feared no intruder.

After dinner in the evening Gauri had sometimes to return to the bureau, and then Isabelle would accompany him. They walked along in the complete darknss, or by the light of the moon, and Gauri would sing to her airs from Carmen or Manon, putting so much feeling into his voice that she trembled with emotion.

Those were the only occasions on which Isabelle went to Ramadet. She never showed herself there, and if she wanted to buy anything she would go to Mugeron or Hamau, or some other village in the opposite direction.

Then, one day in April, de Gaurival returned to the villa and announced casually to Isabelle that, as he had been given leave for the next week-end, he had hired a car at St. Sever, and proposed taking her to Cauteret. Isabelle, on days when the Pyrénées had been visible and they could see the white-capped peaks distinctly outlined against the blue sky, had often said, pointing towards them, " I want to go there "; yet, when Gauri now mentioned his intention, she expressed pleasure indeed, but without enthusiasm. They were already in the third week of April, and except for one night in Biarritz (a car had fetched them from there and they had returned by train the following day) about the end of March, the daily routine of the Villa Madeleine had never been broken. Isabelle feared any change, for

she could not believe such peace could last, and to sacrifice one of these days of bliss, even to derive greater pleasure from it, filled her with apprehension. Gauri had unfolded his plan so casually, too—almost as though it bored him—that Isabelle did not, as usual, clap her hands or spring up in ecstasy. But when she perceived that Gauri's outward indifference was only a mask, and that he was very keen to go; when she discovered, too, that he had planned and matured this excursion in every detail for a long time past, she was infected by his enthusiasm. She loved motoring, she loved seeing new country, she longed to get a glimpse at close quarters of these snow-mountains; she could not indeed have devised a plan herself to give her greater pleasure, so she resolutely brushed aside the lurking apprehension which had at first numbed her feelings.

De Gaurival had hired a two-seater, and at first meant to drive it himself; but later he came to the conclusion that a soldier driving his own car and going towards the frontier would be subjected to rather too close an inspection by the military police, and he therefore gave up the idea.

He showed Isabelle the map and pointed out their route, informing her that they would stop Friday night in Lourdes, Saturday night in Cauteret, and come the whole way back on the Sunday.

As usual he did not refer any question to Isabelle's judgment or choice, but she was more than compensated for this neglect by finding out how much he must have been looking forward to these days to have settled every detail so minutely. Besides, accustomed to take the lead and have things her own way with those around her, it was a welcome change and relief to

submit to the masterful will of her lover, and to feel that she had only to obey.

On the Friday morning she packed her dressing-case, pondering long over what she would or would not take for these two great days. At ten she was ready, but the car had not arrived, and she began to fear that something had arisen to thwart their plans. She knew that a soldier's leave was only signed a few hours in advance, and feared that Gauri's had been stopped.

In her impatience she sprang on her cycle and rode towards Ramadet. At her usual resting-place she sat down by the roadside and waited. A minute later the car came into view at the top of the hill. Isabelle's heart thumped. De Gaurival looked askance at her presence there on the road, and whirled past. He was back at the Villa Madeleine first, and she found him carrying her suit-case upstairs instead of putting it in the car.

"This is much too heavy for such a small car—you don't want so many things for two nights."

"Yes, I do."

"Unlock it."

As Isabelle did so, he took out one thing after another.

"You don't need that, or that——"

"Yes, really."

They disputed over each article till Gauri, beginning to lose patience at the delay, snatched up a small bag.

"The dressing-case itself is too heavy. Put what you need into that and choose quickly. I am going to start in five minutes."

He left the room and ran downstairs, and Isabelle had not a chance to remonstrate. She viewed with regret all her careful preparations, but there was no

time to bewail. She filled her little bag quickly, and, picking it up, followed him down.

The car was really only large enough for two ordinary people and the driver was already above the normal size and weight, so that it was with difficulty that Gauri and Isabelle squeezed themselves in. This was no drawback, however, but added on the contrary to the pure joy and pleasure of their drive.

Madame Duvet and her daughter watched with wide-open eyes the preparations for departure. The elder woman could hardly believe that her lodgers would be in Lourdes that very afternoon. The day before she had related to Isabelle, with bated breath, how she had gone there fifteen years before, walking the whole way. It had been the great event in her life, and all the happiness and good-luck which had come to her since, she put down to this visit, just as at times of sorrow or anxiety she would always say, "Oh, if I could only go to Lourdes again!" Her son-in-law was just then in a dangerous part of the line, and the thought immediately flashed through the minds of mother and daughter that if they could pray *there* for him, their prayers would be granted and his safety assured. Madame Duvet, who rarely talked, had confided to Isabelle, as a secret, all that she must see and do there. This journey had suddenly made her guest an important person in her eyes. For Isabelle, Lourdes merely roused feelings of interest and curiosity; but she realized now that to Roman Catholics the word is magic, and that it often sums up the chief desire of years, perhaps of a lifetime. Isabelle felt it was they and not she who ought to have the chance to go, but she made up her mind at least to bring them back something from there which would act as a charm for them.

The car rolled rapidly along the splendid Landes roads, through pine-woods and pasture-land where women, busily knitting the while, were tending magnificent cattle; and through fields which were being ploughed with much labour by old men and young lads. The oxen, so patient and obedient to their master's voice, were less so to the shriller tones of youth.

They lunched at Pau, and afterwards spent a delightful ten minutes on the terrace looking down into the green gardens below, and on to the long stretch of country beyond, bounded by the snow-covered mountains in the distance.

Some time before arriving at Lourdes, Isabelle caught glimpses between the hills of what looked like a medieval fortress perched on a steep cliff. There were no signs of a town. It was quite a surprise when, at a turning of the road, they found themselves looking right down on to it. This was Lourdes! It lay partly in the valley, partly on the lower slopes of the hills. The famous cathedral, with a great open space in front, was in the centre of the town, and was on a level with the river. It stood well apart from other buildings, whereas most of the houses were crowded and crushed together, and the streets were steep and narrow.

Out of this valley of Lourdes sprang the high crater-like hill which they had seen some kilometres away, and on which was an ancient fortress or castle, now used for barracks.

Coming into Lourdes from the road, they had a bird's-eye view of the town. The site was curious and unique. The high hills all round with their crosses or calvaries, and the snow-mountains in the distance, added to the picturesqueness of the scene. Arriving at the station, which is on one of the slopes in the

town itself, the impression would have been much less striking. They descended the steep and narrow street, already more than half taken up with tramway-lines, left the car at a garage, and made their way at once to the cathedral. It was a magnificent building, and the flight of stone steps which led in a sweeping curve to the principal entrance was in itself a work of art.

The cathedral was composed of three separate places of worship one above the other. Each had its altars, candles, and confessionals. The lowest one was entirely lined from floor to ceiling with pink marble slabs, which had been given by grateful patients or their families in recognition of benefits obtained in Lourdes. Each bore the word "reconnaissance" in silver or gold letters, or a short commemoration of the event. There was inscribed on it almost always, too, the full name, or occasionally only the initials, and the date. These marble slabs had come from people in all parts of the world. As a proof of the immense hold Lourdes has over all classes, all strata of society, this fact was in itself very impressive. In the porches and on the outside of the building there were also common stone slabs, bearing the same words of thanks for recovery from illness or the outpouring of a great sorrow. These had been presented by people who had not been able to afford pink marble, and had therefore been relegated to less conspicuous places. One felt that the givers would have made willing sacrifices to have had their offerings in a place of honour inside the building if the expense had not been altogether beyond their means.

De Gaurival could not drag Isabelle away from these pink walls. She wanted to read all the inscriptions, and was fascinated in conjuring up into life these

pathetic families whose happiness had depended on the health of one of their number, and whose gratitude at their recovery was so unbounded.

The church above was impressive in another way. Its painted windows, its statues, its principal altar with its hundreds of candles, not only gave a distinctly religious atmosphere, but also one of dazzling wealth. The ecstasy and fervour with which worshippers must certainly be always filled here, would be enhanced by a feeling of awe at sight of so rich a display.

Here again the imagination was excited by the dramas of human life, for there were all sorts of personal belongings hung on the wall or displayed in glass cases: an officer's sword, a general's *képi*, a woman's jewels.

An atmosphere of absolute calm and quiet reigned here; there was no moving of chairs or whispered chatter to prevent one getting away from realities. The priests glided about quickly and noiselessly, and sightseers were awed to silence.

When de Gaurival led Isabelle into the open air again, the great beauty of the natural surroundings emphasized the feeling of mysticism which was gradually growing on them.

From a wide balcony in the highest part of the cathedral they looked down on to the esplanade below and the river flowing gently between bright green banks; then hills beyond hills, some bare, some covered with trees. If the founders of Lourdes relied on the effect produced by a combination of nature and religion, they had chosen this site well.

They now made their way to the Grotto, where the miracles of Lourdes are actually performed. It was a little pool of water at the foot of a steep rock behind

the cathedral. There was an altar close by, and a stand for candles, numbers of which were burning. The dark rock overhung the pool, so that it was cool and shaded in this spot even when the sun was bright and hot. In a niche in the rock stood a figure of the Virgin, and hanging on one side, rows and rows of crutches. They had evidently been left there by the people on whom cures had been performed in the waters of the Grotto. While they stood there, men and women came to pray in front of the Grotto, kneeling down beside the railing. Some remained a long time in prayer. Were they interceding for a sick relative, or for what? Isabelle remembered the story of the young girl who had come to pray years ago on that spot and had seen visions. Lourdes at that time was a small village, and the maid unknown except to her immediate neighbours. Now Lourdes was famous, and she herself was ever in the minds of all who worshipped there. De Gaurival had related the story to her.

As the suppliants rose from their knees they lighted a candle big or small, went and drank a cup of holy water from the fountain near by, and then disappeared into the sunlight on their daily routine.

Was their faith justified? Were these rows of crutches a real proof of the efficacy of their faith? The charm and fascination of the spot were already having a marked influence on Isabelle when, on leaving the Grotto, they came upon three soldiers who were making their way there. Two were on crutches, one having had his leg amputated, the third soldier had his head so completely bandaged that only his eyes were to be seen. Why were they going to the Grotto? Isabelle wanted to watch them, and de Gaurival's pressure on the arm which he held was unavailing. They

approached the Grotto, and at the railing they stopped and began talking, and one was evidently explaining different details to the others. After a little while they passed on; they had not prayed or lighted candles; they were, then, just casual sightseers. Isabelle heaved a sigh of relief and allowed herself to be led forward, but she felt it to be a subject for deep meditation.

Though these particular soldiers had not staked their hopes of recovery on the miraculous pool, perhaps others had. There were certainly several hospitals in a place like Lourdes, for not even the smallest village has failed to put its best building at the disposal of the wounded. The honour of bringing back health to their soldiers has not been granted only to the large towns—all have had their share. How many of these young soldiers in Lourdes might not have yearned to get there rather than anywhere else, in the hope of a miracle?

Isabelle now noticed a group of five, all badly wounded, helping each other up the flight of stone steps. One of them had a far-away look in his blue eyes, and she felt certain that he had secret hopes connected with this place. He had heard of others being miraculously cured—why should not he recover the use of his arm?

Isabelle begged de Gaurival to leave her there a little longer while he went to see about an hotel and rooms. She sat down on a seat in the esplanade, and began a conversation with a woman beside her. She said she would like to see a cure. "Oh, but this is not the season for cures; besides, there will be no season at all this year, because of the war." Isabelle was dumbfounded. Was it really true that the priests, or whoever were responsible, were going to neglect their

profession just at a moment when the thoughts of a whole nation were bent upon relieving the sufferings of soldiers? That the publication of a host of books and magazines should cease, that museums should be closed, that motor-buses should stop running, "because of the war," was comprehensible; but that miracles should no longer be performed, when the need was greater than ever it had been, was incredible! Her informant, however, who had begun by telling her how her health had improved since a certain summer when her rheumatism had been miraculously cured, did not seem to find anything extraordinary in this state of things. Yet while they talked, crippled men were continually passing in front of them. She explained that there would be no pilgrimages this year; no weary crowds arriving on foot; no hot, tired, and dusty passengers arriving by train. It never entered her head that there were enough wounded in the town who needed help without any fresh comers. The tales which she continued to relate with unabated enthusiasm no longer interested Isabelle.

The charm and mystic effect of Lourdes had been broken by hearing such stories in full view of wounded men. She was still more disillusioned when de Gaurival came to fetch her and they began their shopping. The shops selling "objets de piété" were numberless, and to see so many pictures of the cathedral and the different calvaries, so many little facsimiles of the Virgin, so many bottles filled with holy water, took away all sense of faith. The objects "blessed" were of course dearer than the others. But what made her complete her purchase hastily and turn away was a pamphlet given her at one of the shop-doors. On the outside was a coloured picture of the Grotto, with a prayer

underneath. Inside, devout prayers were mixed up with advertisements for the shop, " Magasin du Monde Catholique." In the middle of the " Invocations " to the Virgin was, " Très important pour les Pèlerins et Touristes, etc." ; then a hymn, " Vierge Sainte n'oubliez pas," etc; and at the bottom, " Entrée libre." If the people of Lourdes had faith in their religion, how could they intersperse their prayers and hymns with advertisements in this way ? At the hotels as in the shops there was the same spirit, the same curious intermingling of the religious and the essentially material and mundane. In spite of this, Isabelle did not regret having bought souvenirs for the owners of the Villa Madeleine. She had even chosen " objets de piété " from among those that had been blessed, hoping to please them the more.

She left Lourdes with a feeling approaching contempt for the inhabitants. She pitied the wounded there, though they enjoyed a warm climate in spring and such picturesque surroundings. But what a contrast was Lourdes to other towns in France ! Paris had put its best hotels, its wealthiest private houses, its Grand Palais (turned into an immense and extremely well organized hospital), at the disposal of the wounded; other towns had given their largest and most modern buildings; even villages had given their Mairies—yet Lourdes, on which for years the sick had fixed their hopes, was making no attempt to come to the aid of its wounded soldiers.

All the evening Isabelle could talk of nothing else, questioning and arguing till de Gaurival wished they had not stopped there. When she again started the same topic the next morning, he decided not to visit one of the high calvaries, as he had intended, but to continue their road. He therefore went to fetch the

car, and at ten o'clock they were climbing one of the steep streets at the south of the town. They were just outside Lourdes when they were stopped by an official in uniform. Isabelle had not noticed him till the car slowed down. Though the two men on either side of her looked impassive, she felt it was a critical moment. The driver of the car was the first to hand over his papers. This man, having a large garage, was well known in St. Sever, Mont de Marsan, and all that district, but it was more than probable that this military police agent had never heard of him. He did not usually act as chauffeur, but he had never been to Cauteret, and was anxious to see it. Thus it was that when de Gaurival had been negotiating for the car he had offered to drive them there himself. The military police agent examined the car to see if it answered the description on the papers, and then held out his hand to de Gaurival. A soldier going towards the frontier is always a subject of suspicion, and now he was evidently searching for some discrepancy in the papers. Finding no fault or omission in the "permission," however, he now turned to Isabelle. He read carefully every word of the "laisser-passer," and then asked for her passport. Isabelle was terrified; he was going to stop them, they would be turned back. He was going to question her—the chauffeur would discover they were not man and wife. Isabelle dreaded the revelation now, though at many other times she had wanted to proclaim their relations, and insisted that it was wrong to hide them. The woman who had taken her to see the Villa Madeleine told her that she must pretend that they were married, or rooms would be refused them. Isabelle had at first declared she would not deceive such good honest people, and it was only on

persuasion that she had consented to pass as de Gaurival's wife. At this moment, however, in front of their driver, who was to be in close contact with them for another two days, she longed to hide the truth, and looked anxiously at the severe-looking official.

"Age twenty-eight?"

"Oui, Monsieur."

Isabelle thought he was going to ask her to alight from the car to examine her appearance more closely, but without another word, though giving a little unsatisfied shrug of his shoulders, he handed her back her papers and gave the signal to start. Never had the rumble of a car been more delightful in Isabelle's ears. She pressed more closely than ever against de Gaurival's shoulder.

After lunch at Pierrefitte, a steady climb began. The road wound in and out, but always mounted, and the Gave on their left was sometimes a broad and tranquil stream, sometimes an angry torrent in a deep and narrow gorge. The higher they mounted, the greater became Isabelle's exhilaration; she had always loved climbing, and this climb would have enchanted her even though she had been alone. But now she was going towards this high, unknown region with her lover beside her, and she felt that on the mountain, amidst the snow, they would be united as never before.

Occasionally the car did not obey easily. It was probably choked up with dust after the long day's run; also it carried three people instead of two, and the climb was long and sometimes steep.

Every now and then the driver had to stop to examine this or that part of his engine; then Gauri and Isabelle would walk on till the car caught them up again. At every turn in the road their eyes roved over the land-

scape to see if any village was in sight, for none of the party knew the road, and there were no milestones to tell them how far off they still were.

Isabelle was not anxious. She would have liked such a drive to last for ever. She would have counted it no hardship if the car had broken down altogether, and they had had to continue on foot or sleep on the heather beside the road.

It was getting very dark and they were beginning to feel cold when little lights twinkled out from the dark mountain-side. Was that Cauteret nestling in the narrow gorge among the hills? A wave of melancholy swept for a moment over the lovers to think that their drive was over, though de Gaurival was thankful to have arrived safely. His sentiment did not carry him to the extent of wishing to forgo his dinner or to sleep on the bare ground.

Having engaged a room at the hotel, and finding that it was only just after six, de Gaurival proposed that they should go out again. Isabelle was more than ready, though she had imagined the day already over. They stepped out into the black darkness of the village street. The only lights were those which flickered dismally from shut windows, and they felt rather than saw their way. When just beyond the village street, the moon suddenly emerged from behind a cloud. The mountains above them were outlined against the sky, and they appeared to be surrounded on all sides by great walls of rock. The snow gleamed with a silvery light, and they discovered that not only the high mountain-sides were covered with a thick carpet, but that there were great patches of deep snow at their feet. The village which had seemed to them dark, dismal, and sordid as they emerged from their hotel, now

became attractive, mysterious, charming. It nestled cosily among the mountains, transformed by the glory of the snow. For a minute they stood spellbound at this miraculous change, then by common consent they ran towards the nearest snow. They touched it with their feet, then with their hands, and a minute later they were snowballing each other with all their energy.

If de Gaurival threw straighter and harder, Isabelle was more dexterous in avoiding the flying missiles, and it was an even fight. After a few minutes they were obliged to stop for want of breath, and after shaking themselves they walked on arm-in-arm. Finding a seat in some public gardens they sat down, hot and tired with their recent exercise, and rested.

They felt cut off from the world; it seemed to them as though this snow, these mountains, belonged in some special way to them; they were intoxicated by the pleasure of their long drive together and the success of the expedition. They had arrived—they had succeeded in their adventure: nobody could now snatch it from them. They had not seen a soul except for one small boy in the village street—everybody had retired indoors as darkness set in. Was it strange that they should feel themselves masters of all they surveyed? The seat on which they sat seemed a throne. But this intoxication of success and mastery, like other moods of anger, fear, or pleasure, which strung up their nerves, gradually merged into the one absorbing feeling of passion which each inspired in the other.

They retraced their steps slowly and in silence. Isabelle dragged behind. Nature in one of its most glorious forms, mountains, snow and moonlight appealed so strongly to the primitive woman in her, that she

dreaded reaching the hotel. A roof, a room, any product of convention and civilization made her shrink.

The dining-room was deserted; the other guests, if there were any, had already finished the last meal of the day.

The next morning de Gaurival was up and out early, but he returned as Isabelle was finishing her breakfast to tell her to hurry if she wanted a walk before they started on their return journey. The car was in good condition again, and would be ready for them at eleven.

He led her along a narrow path which rose steeply as it reached the woods. Here the snow became so deep that it came well above their ankles, but de Gaurival marched forward resolutely, and Isabelle followed in his footsteps. Once he stopped, for an opening in the trees displayed a wonderful panorama. He pointed out this and that striking feature in a few brief words, and then abruptly started on again. No footsteps had soiled the virgin whiteness of the snow along this path, and the beauty of each tree, each bush, each blade of grass, outlined in sparkling brilliancy in this immeasurable solitude, would have captivated Isabelle but for the incomprehensible mood of her lover.

If she made a remark, he did not answer; if she said she was tired and the snow clogged her feet, he said, "Dépêche toi. Viens." His tone was so sharp and forceful that she obeyed without a word. His will was so powerful that, though half frightened, tired, and longing for a few minutes' rest, she struggled on. The path was becoming still more rough and steep, and the snow made walking arduous. What was the matter with Gauri? And where was he taking her?

Suddenly he left the path, went to the edge of the

cliff by which it was bounded, and sat down, dangling his feet into space. "Come here and sit down." His voice was sterner than ever as he pointed to the snow-covered ground at his side.

Isabelle did as she was bid, trying to talk naturally, to laugh, to appear happy in the expedition. In reality she was afraid, of what she did not know, and when she saw that her lover was sitting sheer over a precipice with a clear drop of some thirty feet, her fears increased. "Assieds-toi." Not daring to demur, she sat down by his side. Suddenly he pulled her down so that she lay full-length in the snow a few inches from the edge. By summoning to her aid all the self-control she possessed she did not flinch, and showed neither fear nor surprise. If she had struggled, she would most undoubtedly have rolled over the edge, whether he willed it or not.

He began to question her, asking what she had done on certain days in Algiers, whom she had met, details about her journey back to France with her husband, with which of their mutual acquaintances she had associated since her return to France, and so on. His manner of questioning her betrayed that these questions had been torturing him for a long time past, and that he had taken a sudden resolve to have certain fears and suspicions set at rest. She realized that just as he had suffered so cruelly when, in the height of his devotion and passion, she had abandoned him, so he was suffering now.

"I cannot forgive, and I would not if I could. Only your death can give ease to my soul, freedom to my thoughts." He emphasized his words by a still stronger grip, that held her immovable. But though everything swam before her eyes, she retained outward composure.

Her hat had fallen off, and Gaurival began mechanically to brush the snow from her hair. Then he touched her face and neck, then he looked at the slight figure so entirely in his power, then he turned her towards him and gazed into her eyes. Her fears vanished, and a feeling of happy triumph surged through her. An answering look met his, steady and full of love. With a half groan he drew her to him hungrily, desperately, as if the physical contact was his last hope and chance of finding peace. . . .

When they reached the hotel the car was waiting in the street. Isabelle quickly changed her wet boots while de Gaurival paid the bill, and a few minutes later they were once more in the car and on their homeward way. Down and down and down—from heaven back to earth, thought Isabelle; and in spite of those moments of terror in the snow, she would have given all she possessed to have the last two days over again.

They returned through Tarbes instead of Pau, and though this route was less interesting and the great national road even a little monotonous, they were perfectly content. During the first hour or two Isabelle tried to treat Gauri coldly, to punish him for his behaviour, but their close contact and the pleasure of the rapid movement prevented her from keeping up this pose for long.

At small villages they would sometimes stop to ask the way and stretch their legs. Wherever it might be, whether town, village, or tiniest hamlet, there were soldiers everywhere; some on leave from the front, some wounded, or perhaps some from a neighbouring camp spending Sunday with their friends.

De Gaurival often sang—blusterous military marches

which he accompanied by drumming on the side of the car; or from time to time sentimental love songs from the operas. He had a splendid tenor voice and sang with much feeling. Isabelle knew all his songs by heart, and loved them all.

They arrived at Ramadet just before dark. Though tired and cramped from being so long crushed into so small a space, they were sorry when the drive came to an end.

A twinkling light shining from the kitchen-window of the Villa Madeleine consoled them. Was it not their home? But, alas! Isabelle's forebodings were realized. The peaceful routine of the Villa Madeleine was interrupted, never to begin again. The very next day she received an urgent letter begging her to bring over to England her little niece. Her sister believing her to be in Paris had no idea of the sacrifice she was demanding. She merely thought that, having no hopes of her husband's immediate return, Isabelle had nothing to keep her in France. For twenty-four hours Isabelle meditated on her reply. It was a case of stating she was not in Paris, and thereby raising questions which would be difficult to answer, or of complying immediately. She knew her sister had enough troubles just then without a new one that would arise if she refused. Isabelle therefore wrote promising to do as she was asked.

The last two days were desperately sad. De Gaurival was kind and accepted her decision without a word. This was more than Isabelle had dared to hope, and she was truly grateful. Once he said: "Two days more; let us enjoy them to the full—think what two days would have meant to us a year ago when two hours was the utmost we could expect!"

But, try as they might they could not talk or smile or find comfort. She could not bring herself to begin to pack, for she dreaded to see de Gaurival's face when all her little possessions should disappear from that room.

The only topic which could soothe and calm them was Isabelle's return. But de Gaurival, as on other occasions when they had parted, insisted on treating Isabelle as if she were going to pass out of his life altogether. Isabelle, for her part, felt that to fix any plans in war-time was futile. She therefore talked on the subject without conviction.

Then, on May 12 a car from St. Sever appeared at six a.m. before the Villa Madeleine, and Isabelle, with all her belongings, was packed into it and drove away.

CHAPTER V

AT THE FRONT

"RAMADET,
"20, 5, 1915.

"I HOPE, dear Madame, that you have arrived safely in London, and that you are glad to find yourself once more in your own family. You must have arrived there during the great sensation caused by the sinking of the *Lusitania*. What rage and grief must those feel who understood what a liner like that stood for. And what a number of victims! But it was what one might have expected, and I cannot yet understand why, when the attacks of German submarines are unfortunately so effective, English shipowners allow such ships to make the journey. They must change their tactics, even though it wound their pride.

"My leave was a dreary one. Rain at Sever, where I slept on Friday evening. Rain at Biarritz. And yet how much I enjoyed the ride from here to St. Sever (on your bicycle, by the way), in the twilight through the beautiful, quiet woods. Especially did I look out for and recognize certain spots where we had rested together.

"I went by train, but returned by motor on Monday evening; it was in the little car which you know. Driving from Bayonne to Ramadet, we passed through Dax, Tartas, St. Sever. The road from Tartas to St. Sever, which you do not know, was as splendid as the rest and everywhere lined with beautiful trees.

"Yes, truly the Landes and the Pyrénées have great attractions, and how easily, living in such a country, could one forgo Africa.

"The communiqués to-day tell us of an interesting offensive near Arras. I think and hope that events are going to move more quickly, and that contingents will soon be sent up from this camp, which is too distant by far from the front.

"I hope, then, not to be here much longer, and shall find means, if necessary, of insuring my departure one way or another.

"I was photographed on Sunday at Bayonne. If the photos turn out well I will send you one. Fortunately it is not coloured photography, or the change in my uniform would be revealed to you. No more red. Blue trousers, blue *képi* without a number, leggings. It is really a great improvement on the old, but it is a change, and you don't like changes!

"I had your letter from Paris, which is all 'reason.' I must evidently expect little else of you, must I?

"P.S. I return a photograph you had forgotten to take. As to the other things you forgot, it is rather difficult for me to pack and send them. Buy others. These I will keep safely for you at Biarritz to be given to you later—after the war."

"RAMADET,
"2, 6, 1915.

"MA CHÈRE AMIE,

"I have this very minute heard I am being sent to Bayonne with my class. And after? I do not know at all what they will do with me at Bayonne, or whether I shall be able to remain in the Cyclist Corps. I know nothing. I just go.

"You shall have news of me. I may ask you to join me. Adieu.

"I have been passing through a very melancholy time these last two weeks, and that is why I would not write to you. Excuse me."

ANGOULÊME,
"9, 6, 1915.

"We left Bayonne yesterday with thirty to thirty-five kilogrammes on our backs, passed Bordeaux at two o'clock, and arrived here this morning. Four hours to kill here. These military trains do not run like the regular ones, as you know. We are not allowed to go into town. You have often seen these stations full of soldiers standing and sitting about in every corner, and always eating something or other, so you can just imagine me. To-morrow Noisy-le-Sec, then the north—four days' journey. I slept in the provision van, and discovered in the morning that I had been lying on loaves of bread. It was lumpy and very hard, of course, but I am all right. But the pack is heavy.

"You are really very ignorant about military transports to think that we should pass by Paris and that I could stop there. For the moment I am just a number in the ranks."

"NOEUX-LES-MINES,
"12, 6, 1915.

"A word from here, where I have just passed my first night within hearing of the guns. The noise is not in the least upsetting,—what is much more so, to tell the truth, is the sleeping one hundred and fifty in a small barn and on the floor. We have now travelled for two whole days, luckily for me always in the provision van. We passed by Le Touquet and Etaples, and are here opposite Bethune—a bit of England, you might almost feel. Many 'khakis' say bonjour and a few words in French. I answer by

singing, 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' which pleases them immensely.

"The pack is very heavy, but I'm all right. We leave to-night (it is impossible to march during the day), and shall reach to-morrow, at last, the camp of the 442nd Regiment. It is situated in a very hot corner. I know a C.O. there who may be of service to me.

"Now we are going to have a good lunch—a friend, two non-coms., and myself—unmindful of the rattling of the windows. I think some English fifteen-inch guns are working not far from here. Adieu to you.

"I shall not know until to-morrow which are my battalion and company. At present I only know the secteur which the 442nd are in—it is 113."

"SECTEUR 113,
"*June* 14, 1915.

"I give you my address above in the hope that you will send me a card from time to time. You see, I am asking for it for once, though it goes against the grain for me to do so. I think of you, and remember the past. And I do not forget that I might have remained at Ramadet if I had chosen, or have been taken as chauffeur in some medical unit. But I will regret nothing, and everything is all right. I am, nevertheless, in the terrible part of the line mentioned by all the communiqués since May 9. It is close to where the English front joins ours. After three days' journey we arrived the night before last, during an intense cannonade. We could make out the front by the brilliance of the fuses. My pack had quite done for me. Twelve kilometres that night! My regiment is not in the fire trenches. It is at present doing fatigue duties, bringing up food, ammunition,

and water to the regiments in the first and second lines. Everything must be done at night.

" We live in cellars, for we are generally bombarded twice a day, morning and evening. We can get out a little very early in the morning, or in the evening between seven and nine. All the rest of the time we are in cellars or on fatigues. I am in the cellar of a brewery with one hundred and twenty-five men of my company. The whole town here is destroyed—not a roof anywhere except the spire of the church.

" What a contrast ! Oh, you with your baths, and my dirty hands ! But all the same, everything is all right. And I am astonished how comfortably I can eat in my *gamelle* without washing it. Water is difficult to get, and guns are thundering night and day. Yet how can one think of complaining when one sees the crowd of soldiers coming out of the trenches plastered with mud, and the numbers of wounded. I sleep well on the straw, just as well as in a good bed, although crowded among a lot of other men and surrounded by flies and dirt. I will write to you again when I have seen more. There are many Biarritzois here who often do me good turns. The C.O. happens to be our agent at Peret. He was mentioned in despatches in December with his whole battalion. He is trying to get me taken as his despatch-rider.

" Newspapers reach us here—cyclists bring them every morning. Would you sometimes send me English cigarettes, or one of those good English plum-cakes which keep so well ?

" When will all this end ? My comrades who sleep in the straw with me are all asking the same question. If you could hear the guns of every calibre, including those firing ' marmites,' working ceaselessly day and

night, you would think it could not last much longer. At the first shell which announces a cannonade in our direction everybody runs to ground in the cellars. Yesterday a young sergeant from Bayonne, who used to be our vaguemestre at Ramadet, was killed in the street—killed instantaneously: his wife at Bayonne never even had a chance to see him. And every day we get casualties either here or in the wood near by. But we are careful, and I shall certainly see you again, if you wish it. Adios.

"At Mass in a barn yesterday we sang to the sound of the guns. How harmonious and beautiful are these voices of the South!—and so true in time and tune! It was very stirring."

"BETHUNE,
"*June* 24, 1915.

"I am here as it were on English ground—in other words, in an English garrison. That is to say, Bethune. After ten days in a crowded cellar, suffering the unavoidable disagreeables of the common mess, and of mud and dirt, not to mention very arduous fatigue duties under shell-fire, carrying munitions, water, and provisions by day and by night—I am saved! Oh, not from shells! No such thing! But——! I have been appointed despatch-rider to the Commandant of the 3rd Battalion, who, as I told you, is no other than Mr. Adour, our agent at Peret and British Consul there. I get the privilege of reading his *Daily Mail* every day; I sleep in his cellar and eat at his table, and am able to wash!

"I have had two letters from you sent on from Biarritz. I will write more fully as soon as it is possible. We were terribly bombarded from eleven to twelve to-day, and had to lunch in the cellar.

To have a bicycle gives me a certain amount of independence again. I thoroughly enjoyed my twelve-kilometre ride here, all the more because in this town we are safe from shells. It is quite a 'cushy' job, as you English say! The country is not a bit like Ramadet, and I have to give the pass-word to every sentinel along the road.

"It seems from your letters that you did not receive my first telegram from Bayonne at the end of May, which was meant to convey that you should join me there. You did not come. The second telegram was intended to say, 'Don't come, I am leaving.'

"I am very hungry, and have several commissions to do before I start back on my twelve kilometres to my cellar. I am quite all right. Bonjour vous."

"*June* 30.

"Commandant Adour, C.O., has taken me as his personal despatch-rider, as I told you, and I also act as *chef de popote*—that is, I do all the catering for his cook. I have meals with the C.O. himself. He has the Croix de Guerre—which answers, I believe, to the English D.S.O.—and a mention in despatches, for the affair at Givenchy when the 442nd Colonial came to the aid of your Hindoos at a most critical juncture. Our men, in fact, saved the situation. That is why the English Government sent the battalion five hundred thousand English cigarettes. That meant five hundred per man. 'Black cat.' They are still being smoked, and I am often offered some. The Givenchy affair took place in December, and a few days ago several officers and non-coms. of our battalion went off to a place fifteen kilometres away to receive their honours. The Colonel was given a C.M.G., or Companion of St.

Michael and St. George. All these decorations were presented by the Duke of Connaught's son in the presence of the French General commanding the tenth army.

"I will explain the photos I enclose. They were taken by Adour himself.

No. 1, with a head appearing just above the level of the pavement, is Commandant Adour. He is just about to scramble out of the hole, which is our safety exit from the cellar in case the staircase is blocked by a shell. The woman of about twenty-seven standing on the pavement a little farther back, was servant to the owners of this brewery, and was left in charge when they fled at the beginning of the bombardment. She and her brother have been sleeping in the same cellar with the Commandant and his Adjutant and me. She left a few days ago, however, when the bombardment became more dangerous, but she was unable, of course, to take any of her belongings with her. What a litter of things there is!—books, hats, dresses, women's toilet gear, papers, crockery, china, glass, a piano, etc., and everything in inextricable confusion. We naturally help ourselves to anything which can be of use to us either in the way of food or greater comfort.

"The open window with the broken shutters and the glass all shattered which you see just behind the young woman, belongs to the O.R. of the Commandant. We also mess there. We get excellent food, extremely well cooked by an ex-chef of the Carlton of Biarritz, the daily menus being arranged by him and the *chef de popote*—your servant. This orderly room is just over the cellar where we sleep, and occasionally in the middle of dinner we have to fly for safety, leaving our meal half-finished.

"The second photo shows the buildings of the

brewery and its courtyard. The building at the left has since been completely destroyed by shells. The one on the right is the one I lived in when in the ranks, when we slept one hundred and twenty-five in one room on straw. The roof is destroyed, and also all the top rooms. Since I became a despatch-rider I have been in clover, sleeping only five or six in a room, and eating at a table. The third photo is the principal street of Aix Noulette. At the top you can see the entrance to the system of communication trenches leading to the firing trenches, where fighting has now been going on for two and a half months. The town has been shelled every day all that time.

" You will notice that none of the Biarritzois whom you see in the courtyard of the brewery look any the worse for their experiences."

" *July* 16, 1915.

" My regiment left that hell, that corner of Aix Noulette, the day before yesterday on foot in pouring rain. Then yesterday, at midday, more than one hundred motor-lorries picked up our three battalions, and brought us some sixty kilometres to the west towards the sea. A royal journey ? We were white with dust. The despatch-rider of the battalion acted as pioneer to the procession, and was exceedingly ' bucked ' with his new duties. But my machine was terribly laden.

" We are in lovely country here and quite quiet, but we shall leave again in two or three days. Where for ? For the east, probably. Motor-drivers are again in demand, but I think I shall follow the fortunes of the Commandant, and enjoy the relative comfort which he allows me to share with him.

" You must not be angry at my not having written.

Where I was before, life was spiritually a blank for me —there could be no idyll, no nothing! The most abhorred woman, the most adored existed no more! Only one thing counted—to avoid this shell, that dangerous spot, to live through the next few minutes! Just think! In the last fifty days the regiment has had more than two hundred wounded—not to mention the killed—alas! Now, luckily, we have left there, and wherever we may go it cannot be worse than over there. For the time being we are happy, lying out in the open with impunity. Adios.

"I forbid you to send me letters other than your own—neither those of your family nor of your friends interest me in the least."

"MA CHÈRE AMIE, "16, 6, 1915.

"I wrote to you in haste this morning to tell you that I am in clover, far from that hell I told you of.

"We left there on the 14th in the evening, while an intense bombardment was going on close to us. You know how I hate and detest parcels! Well, if you could only have seen my poor over-laden machine!—and me too in no better case, with my rifle and mackintosh! And to add to our misery, we started under a deluge of rain, in absolute darkness, on a road often blocked by troops of all arms, infantry, artillery, and horses. I had continually to take refuge in the ditch to escape being crushed or run over, though I showed my little electric torch all the time in self-preservation. The next day, however, motor-lorries brought us here, as I told you, and we are still in amazed wonder to no longer hear the guns, and even now we mechanically look round for cellars or dugouts to shelter us. Our period of rest will be short, alas! for

we leave again in two days. It is said that we are going to Vosges or Alsace this time, by train.

" I told you this morning why I had not written. Preoccupation with the shelling puts all other thoughts out of one's head. The principal thing was to save one's skin.

" I received your letters, and one parcel which arrived some little time ago—writing-paper and chocolates. Since then nothing, neither cigarettes nor cakes. I received your explanation of the reason in your last letter, and thank you all the same.

" This afternoon, feeling calm and happy and having no messages to take (though there is a big town twelve kilometres away), I am writing to you, though your letters do not tempt me to do so. At a first glance they certainly appease and comfort me, but when I begin to study them, I find contradictions and am tortured by what I read between the lines and wish I had not heard from you at all!

" You could certainly have come to Bethune, but you see that I have left there now, and do not know where I shall be next.

" Chauffeurs are again in demand, and I nearly put in my name, thinking I might be lucky enough to be sent to the rear, where you could have joined me. But I gave up the idea. I felt that my duty now lay in following my Commandant, and sharing the fortunes of the 3rd Battalion which, by the way, looks splendid to-day in the green fields enjoying a well-earned rest.

" Nothing could be more desirable, I grant, than to get into the Motor Transport Service in Paris, Bordeaux, or Bayonne (that would mean Biarritz); but when it is a matter of transporting munitions or wounded, it is less pleasant and comfortable. And besides, you have

been the means of turning me aside from my path so often that I mean no more to worry myself about you when coming to any sort of decision. So you make your own plans, and I will make mine, come what may. 'A Dieu vat,' as the sailors say.

"Above all, please do not expect me, in anything that concerns you, to tell you all I think, any more than I ask you to say what you think. Write to me when you like. Your letters are, it is true, very welcome, but I am not going to ask for them, for I myself do not mean to write often. Besides, you would triumph too much over such a request, my proud English friend!

"However, to-day I do just wish to please you (perhaps it is this most welcome silence and our beautiful, natural surroundings which make me wish it); and so I am sending you with my letter some more photos of the village where I lived a whole month either sheltering in a cellar, or riding at full-speed behind our batteries where shells were always falling. It is only a few days since shrapnel was flying over my head and all round me as I bent low over my handle-bars. But my good star has brought me through.

"These photos, with which I part rather grudgingly, I must confess, will, I hope, reach you safely and give you pleasure. And yet, who knows whether they will, wrapped up as you are in your various occupations and pleasures!

"I have good news from my bank, which has decided to give a salary to those of us who are on active service. I have had a letter from Robin, who is making enormous profits in his shipping business.

"Your friend Hallou has been made a lieutenant. Drau of Algiers has been called up and is stationed at Orléans. The military authorities treated him as they

did me on his return to France, not allowing him any breathing-space, but putting him into training immediately, in spite of his enormous weight.

"I read the *Daily Mail* from time to time; I do not know why, but I feel less pleasure lately in reading English.

"Have a good time, you lucky woman, and take enough baths for yourself and me too!

"Meet me at Bayonne on the return of the 442nd. But when will that be?"

"17, 7, 1915.

"I had the joy yesterday of riding along a splendid road shaded by old trees of a lovely green. How beautiful nature is! No whistling of shells; perfect peace, in spite of the numerous military convoys which are camping everywhere in the fields. C'est beau la vie!

"Last night I posted at a village two kilometres from here (St. Riquier) a letter enclosing more photos for you. I hope you will get them.

"And, you see, I am writing again to-day. Certainly it seems I wish to please you. Why, I don't know!

"I have just had a splendid night in the garret of the house in which we have been living the last two days. But there were not two hundred of us this time, only two non-coms. and myself, and any amount of straw. To tell the truth, I could sleep now almost as well on stones.

"We leave to-morrow for a place twelve kilometres away, where, it is said, we are to take train to Alsace; but no one knows for certain. In any case I shall be all right. The Commandant tells me that I am to travel with the staff. In a few minutes I must do the catering, and must buy enough good things to last us two days.

"And, mon amie, once over there I will let you know my new sector.

"Well! There you are! Are you pleased? Two letters yesterday, one to-day. Do not be surprised if I do not write to you now for a month, or till the end of the war!"

"*July* 18, 1915.

"Do you want just one last card? We left this morning at eleven o'clock, in glorious weather, and the battalion has just reached its destination twelve kilometres away. It was a splendid road, often through shady woods. Three times we marched through villages to the bugles and drums. What a long time since we had heard them or taken part in a march in any regular order! We all enjoyed it. Your humble servant headed the procession with the other cyclists. We entrain this evening."

"BAR-SUR-AUBE,
"*July* 19, 1915.

"A good journey in a cattle-truck. Lunch in a first-class carriage with the Etat-Major of the battalion. We are resting here for an hour. It appears we are going into the Vosges near Epinal, and shall arrive about midnight."

"NANCY,
"20, 7, 1915.

"Good journey; good weather. We are going into camp eighteen kilometres from here."

"PLAVIGNET,
"23, 7, 1915.

"I am taking advantage of the departure of a friend for Bayonne to ask him to post this letter either at Paris or Bayonne or at some place on his way down. Thanks to this chance, I can tell you where

I am, which, as you know, is absolutely forbidden. Whatever you do, don't be so foolish as to put the above address on your letters. You have no business to know it. Address as usual to the regiment which is at present in Secteur 135.

"It is now six days since we had any mail. They promise we shall have it this evening. At last!

"I wrote you a card from Nancy, where we arrived on the morning of the 20th. The battalion started immediately for Plaviget, which is sixteen kilometres to the south of Nancy, and about thirty-five kilometres from the front. I cycled on in advance, and was delighted to find a large and pretty village situated along the banks of the Moselle—an attractive river the Moselle. The country is magnificent everywhere, both along the road and here. And no shells! You can imagine how it has put new life into the whole regiment. And we are 'au repos' here, it is said, like all the rest of the Army Corps, for forty-five days counting from July 5. That means we shall be here for three weeks. It is too good to be true!

"The other afternoon I took a plunge in the river. Can you imagine the joy of it? The water is always cool here. I was horribly tired and grubby—grubby beyond imagination—after this journey. I came out calm and refreshed, clean and wonderfully rested. And that same evening I slept between white sheets. It was more than a month since such an event had occurred!

"We are lodged in the house of the curé, a good fellow with a military bearing and more than six feet high, who appreciates cigars and good cognac. Our bedroom, very much like a school dormitory, has three beds. It is large and airy, and adorned with religious

pictures and images of the Virgin. It is restful, it is healthy, it is altogether good after our time in Aix Noulettes where, especially the last few days, the shells were becoming more and more dangerous. There are six of us in the mess—the curé, the Commandant, the doctor, a *maréchal des logis*, who looks after the Commandant's horses, the Battalion Adjutant, and myself. The conversation is full of interest: religion, philosophy, England, Ireland, political rumours about the war—no subject, in fact, is beyond our ken! Excellent cooking always. Very good Lorraine beer too—for we are not far from the frontier!

"Behind this big house is a garden two hundred metres long, wherein is every flower, fruit, and vegetable imaginable. How charming it is to wander around in the company of this big fellow of a curé, who is a bon-vivant in every sense! We are already good friends.

"We are not allowed to leave the camp, but as I am a cyclist I can always get hold of the pass-word, and I have explored the surrounding country, which is lovely. Even should the regimental flag fly to-morrow over the curé's house, which necessitates a guard before the door, I should still be able to get out.

"I hope even to escape to Nancy sometimes. Thus if it is true that we are really resting as long as we think, it is simply magnificent.

"You see, I am profiting by the terrible months which the 442nd have gone through. Unlike most of them, luckily for me, I only had one month at Aix Noulettes, but it was a month that counted seriously! I might have remained there under six foot of earth!

"Are you coming this way? Up, great traveller, you who pretend to be able to pass anywhere. I am

very doubtful whether you will succeed, for we are still in the first army zone, though forty kilometres from the front. One must have an urgent reason for a *laissez-passer* to get to Nancy. I do not, therefore, urge it; besides, our rest here depends, of course, to a great extent on the Boches and their movements. I do not mean they will ever get through. On that head I have no anxiety.

"What we all desire more than anything is our liberty once more, and I, the six months' leave still owing to me. However, just now, far from that hell over there, I am not going to complain. I am quite happy.

"I make no mention of your English miners. It is better not, isn't it? Adieu. I could not be in better health or better spirits.

"I had the great pleasure to-day of playing *pelote basque* with a wooden racquet. I got on quite well, and won my match with the doctor as a partner. Tell me if I may expect you, so that I may prepare for your coming and make you as comfortable as circumstances allow."

CHAPTER VI

NANCY

THE last of these letters found Isabelle on a visit to friends in Surrey. She had only arrived there two days before, and was expected to remain three weeks. It was a beautiful country house and they were a large party. When the invitation had arrived she had accepted it with enthusiasm, and had been the envy of her younger sisters at home in Liverpool. But on reading this letter, tennis, horses, music, all the things she was enjoying and had intended to enjoy, her whole visit, seemed to lose all their attraction. How futile these pleasures when Gauri was waiting for her! Yet it was more than likely she might arrive in Paris, only to find she could go no farther. What folly, then, to cut short this visit and be hung up in Paris all alone! In spite of all arguments against it, however, she did not really hesitate one instant in her intention. She telegraphed to an aunt in London to expect her the following day, and the very next morning she was in the passport office of Bedford Square waiting her turn for an interview.

Instead of asking to go to Paris, as she first intended, she mentioned Nancy as her destination.

"What is your business there?"

"To visit friends."

"What name?"

Could she give her lover's name? She would not

have dared to say it to one of her own countrymen, but this young Frenchman looked so ardent and bold, and at the same time so sympathetic that, taking a pencil from the desk, she wrote it down.

"Of what regiment?" From the way he asked, she knew he had at once guessed her secret, and, hot and trembling, she wrote the military address underneath the name.

"Is there any chance of my getting leave to go to Nancy? If not, I would like my passport signed for Paris, and I will try and get on from there."

"It may be given you from here, but you must wait three days. We must telegraph to France, and shall not receive an answer before that."

"Three days! Oh, it's too long!"

"I should advise you to wait, as you may find greater difficulties in Paris than here."

Isabelle had not before been favoured with such kindly and gratuitous advice in a passport office, and she decided to take it. She telegraphed to de Gaurival that her journey was delayed for a few days, not knowing that telegrams are never sent to the front, but are forwarded by letter from Paris. At the same time she wrote a long letter explaining what had happened, expressing hope to be with him in less than a week.

Isabelle could not at first invent a pretext for her sudden departure for France. Her people at home would write and question her closely. She could not put them off as easily as she had her friends in Surrey.

After careful reflection, in order to avoid all explanations and interrogations, she made up a story which had not the slightest foundation—namely, that she was expecting her husband back from the States, and that he would sail direct to France.

After this her mind was less pre-occupied and she devoted herself entirely to making the necessary preparations for her journey during those three days while she waited for her passport. Sometimes, as if it were an excuse for what she was about to do, she would say to herself: "It is not as if I shall ever reach my soldier! I know I shall be stopped in the war zone. Then why give trouble to my family as well as myself for something that will never happen?"

A letter from Bedford Square telling her to call at the French Consulate came on the fourth day after her visit there. Isabelle went there with a beating heart, and found that her passport had been signed with permission—"vu l'honorabilité de la personne"—to go to Nancy.

On arriving in Paris, Isabelle immediately went from the Gare du Nord to the Gare de l'Est to have her passport stamped ready for the next morning. After a long day's journey she was in need of dinner and sleep, but she was afraid of missing her train if she left anything for the morrow. Then she went to the post office to telegraph to Gaurival, but found that no telegrams were accepted for the front, and realized that he could not therefore have received those sent from England. What should she do if he did not meet the train? If her letters had not yet reached him, he would not be expecting her.

She stayed the night at an hotel, but, troubled with this new anxiety, she slept little, and was tired and limp with fatigue when she embarked on the train at eight o'clock the next morning. The train was crowded with officers and soldiers; there was perhaps one woman to twenty men. Isabelle, once beyond Paris, felt a little more at ease and slept. In the restaurant car

she was the only woman passenger. For the first time she began to wonder what it would be like so near the front. Would it be very different from the rest of France? Would there be so minute a proportion of women there too? Then she would be conspicuous indeed. Her reflections were interrupted by a man's voice beside her saying something which sounded like, "Laissez-moi passer." She mechanically made room for him, but glancing up, saw a military gendarme, who was saying: "Votre laisser-passer!" Taken by surprise by this formidable personage, she blushed and fumbled long for her papers before finding them. She noticed all eyes were fixed on her. He handed them back without a word, and she tried to continue her lunch. She was sitting opposite a young aviator of a Flying Corps, very fair and very young, and to hide her embarrassment she spoke to him. He answered a little curtly, and they neither of them spoke again.

"Perhaps he thinks I am a spy," Isabelle thought, "and he is afraid he might be looked upon as an accomplice if we talked."

Feeling guilty, she knew she must probably look so, and as it was in any case impossible to explain her journey to Nancy, she thought it better not to talk at all. The train was getting hotter and stuffier hour by hour, and it was a relief when she found that it was nearly two o'clock and that they were keeping to time. It was at Toul that passengers' papers had last been examined, and now they were nearing Nancy. She collected her belongings ready to alight, and waited impatiently for the approach of the big town.

Here it was! The minutes seemed interminable while she waited in the narrow corridor till she herself

could jump on to the platform. She made her way quickly to the exit. There was a small group of people waiting to meet the train, but no Gauri!

What was to be done? What had happened? Where was she to go? How was she to let him know she was there? Had he been kept at Plavignet? Where was Plavignet? Did she not risk getting him into trouble if she went there without warning him?

Nevertheless, she went back into the station and asked about the trains to Plavignet. There was no station there. The nearest was three miles distant from it. She must also procure a safe-conduct, for hers was only for Nancy. She asked if she could drive there. It was fifteen miles, and even for driving she must have a *sauf-conduit*.

So keen was her distress that for a moment she thought of asking for a return train to Paris. She already fancied herself on her way back to England, and her whole escapade seemed suddenly to assume the proportions of a horrible nightmare.

The porter whom she had engaged kept looking curiously at her all this time; she must decide something. The station was at a corner of a big square, and Isabelle, looking round and across for de Gaurival, had noticed the Hotel d'Angleterre. She had overheard somebody in the train saying it was the best hotel at Nancy, so, obliged to give orders of some sort, she asked her porter to carry her bag there. Entering the hotel, and before even inquiring about rooms, she asked for paper, and wrote a note to Gauri, addressing it to his military address. But it would take at least two days to get an answer, and what should she do alone in Nancy for two days? She determined to speak to the woman in

the office as soon as there were fewer people about, and meanwhile left the hotel to post her letter.

She had just slipped it into the letter-box near the station and was returning across the square, when whom should she see coming towards her, wheeling his bicycle, but de Gaurival!

They did not embrace or shake hands.

"Gauri, there you are!" There was exasperation in her voice.

"Me voilà!"

"Why weren't you at the station?"

"I missed the train."

"How could you?"

"Well, I left Plavignet in plenty of time, but I dawdled on the road. I preferred to endure my suspense amidst fields and hedges rather than at the station. Then I discovered I was going to be late, and cycled hard, but the train had come in and the station was already empty by the time I arrived."

"It was too bad of you."

"*I* was annoyed with *you*. You might have waited five minutes at the station for me."

"Well, of course, I never thought of your being *late*. How could I possibly imagine such a thing?"

"You arrived very punctually?"

"Of course."

"Yesterday, when I came for the second time to meet you, the train was two hours late."

"You came to meet me yesterday? But I always said I was coming to-day."

"I only got your letters this morning."

"I forgive you a little, then. But what were you going to do if we had not met?"

"I was going to all the hotels to ask for you."

" You thought I would go to an hotel, then ? Well, that's what I did. I went to the Hotel d'Angleterre."

" And what were you doing here ?"

" Posting a letter to you."

" Already ?"

" I was going back to Paris if I had not heard from you before the day after to-morrow."

" Didn't you think of going to the post office to get a letter from me ?"

" No, I should never have thought of that."

" Well, I left one for you at the Poste Restante when I came here yesterday, giving you full instructions, for I can't come to Nancy very often, and I did not intend to try to meet you again. But when your letters reached me this morning, I changed my mind."

" Fortunately. I should never have thought of the Poste Restante, and I should not have known what to do."

They were walking across the square as they talked, and now they sat down at a table on the pavement outside a café, and sipped through straws large tumblers of lemon-squash. Both were thirsty that hot August day—Isabelle from the dusty train, de Gaurival from his long ride.

When both were cooler and calmer, de Gaurival gave his instructions to Isabelle.

" Return to the hotel, take as good a room as you can get, and make yourself cosy and comfortable. I will house my cycle in some café and join you in half an hour."

" We are not going to Plavignet to-day, then ?"

" No. I shall risk staying the night here, but I must leave to-morrow as soon as it is light. You will follow me later."

It was seven o'clock when they left the Hotel

d'Angleterre to go and dine in a restaurant of the Place Stanislas. On the way, de Gaurival pointed out to Isabelle the holes in the stonework and the broken panes of stained glass in Nancy Cathedral. He explained how one of the first German shells dropped on the town had fallen on the stone pavement just outside, and had bespattered the cathedral wall and the neighbouring houses with shrapnel. They peeped inside the Cathedral, and it would have delighted Gauri to acquaint her with the whole history of Lorraine as it is there represented, but it was already too dark to see things clearly. He pointed out the beautiful iron-work gates of the Place Stanislas, with their hanging lamps; and they also examined the big monument in the middle of the Square.

During dinner, de Gaurival told Isabelle stories of his experiences at the front, and those awful weeks at Aix Noulettes. It made them feel very cosy, very safe in this little restaurant, with its pink-shaded lights.

On their way back to the hotel the streets were almost empty. Isabelle noticed four men in uniform walking abreast in the road, but felt no surprise till they suddenly signalled to de Gaurival to stop. Isabelle, thinking they were acquaintances, moved forward and waited. She heard de Gaurival say: " J'accompagne cette dame à son hotel." The men looked towards her and let him go without further questions. De Gaurival, on joining her, looked at his watch. " Half-past nine ! What a fool I am ! I had quite forgotten. No soldier may be out in Nancy after nine. What an escape ! It is a marvel they let me off. Perhaps they were impressed by the calmness with which you waited there for me. Let's hurry. I don't want to be caught by any more patrols."

The next morning Isabelle, by Gauri's instructions (he himself had left at sunrise), went to the Commissaire de Police to ask for a safe-conduct to Plavignet. This she was given, but was refused a permit to cycle. She then engaged a carriage, did some shopping, and at half-past ten started off on her fifteen-kilometre drive. She was disappointed in the country, which had none of the charm of the Landes, though undulating and with woods here and there.

They passed several military posts on their way, and each time Isabelle saw a soldier step forward with fixed bayonet as a signal to them to stop, she trembled. But the soldiers evidently knew her driver, for as soon as they recognized him they spoke to him, and he, with a backward nod, evidently gave the required information about her. She could never hear what was said, but all was well, for she did not even have to produce her papers.

As they came within sight of Plavignet, Isabelle studied her plan of the village still more carefully. She hoped to pass unnoticed, and at least to avoid having to ask her way or give the name of the woman with whom she was to lodge.

" A gauche maintenant, et arrêtez-vous à la troisième maison à droite." She tried to give her orders as if she knew the village, but as a matter of fact she was not even sure if this was the right road.

She knocked at the door. The woman who opened it showed no surprise at seeing her. She was evidently expecting her, and Isabelle, with as few words as possible, and giving a large tip to the driver to prevent him remaining longer than necessary at the door, entered the house.

Her room was small, the one and only window looked

out on to the narrow road; it was a contrast in every way to her quarters at the Villa Madeleine. And yet Isabelle could have found it all perfect had de Gaurival only been there to greet her. But she lunched alone. Directly afterwards she went upstairs, unpacked, and finally, as there was no arm-chair, lay down on her bed.

Suddenly it seemed to her she recognized de Gaurival's footstep on the road. Refraining from looking out of the window for fear of being disappointed she was still lying on the bed when he entered the room.

" You seem to have made yourself very comfortable already."

" Did you expect to find me standing waiting on the doorstep ?"

" All the morning I was wandering about the village street on the lookout for your carriage. I told you to be here before twelve. I had to go and lunch with my ' popote ' then."

" But other days you are going to lunch with me ?"

" To-morrow my Commandant is going away on leave, so I shall probably be able to."

" You must, always; I can't have meals alone."

Both nursed their feeling of irritation as long as possible, but in spite of themselves, the fact that they were together was so soothing to their nerves and feelings that the conversation soon took a more amicable turn. Isabelle showed Gauri her purchases, and little by little told him to the smallest detail all she had seen, said, and heard, since he left her asleep in the early hours of the morning.

The sun was already low when Isabelle, shaking and rousing herself, said: " Let's go for a stroll."

On the road beneath the window a number of men

were playing ninepins. Skill counted for little with such an uneven, bumpy surface, and such rough wooden balls and pins; but the men seemed to be enjoying the game, and they often laughed, applauded, or disputed a point. How simple they were, these men! How easy to please! They were all oldish men, past the common age of love and war, and only desiring the quiet and comfort of their homes and the affection of wife and children; yet it was these men who had had to toil night and day under shell-fire in Aix Noulettes, and who were now "resting," herded together in barns and without a semblance of family life.

Isabelle and Gauri could not leave the house without going through this group, but Isabelle so longed for a little fresh air that it was settled she should slip out first as quietly as possible, and that Gauri should follow a few minutes later. They hoped that they would pass unnoticed, for the men seemed absorbed in their game. But Isabelle was immediately detected as not belonging to the village. Her clothes or her manner betrayed her. The men stopped playing to stare. She heard, "Où est le jeune lieutenant? Vous l'avez trouvé, l'amoureux, Mademoiselle? C'est un de nous, l'homme heureux?" and other remarks of which she sometimes caught only one word. They were all uttered jocosely and with a good-natured laugh, and Isabelle, though embarrassed, did not feel annoyed. Gauri, however, when she repeated all she had heard, but had only half understood, was very angry.

"If you want to remain here, you must stay indoors. I can't be seen about with you, and you can't go out alone."

Isabelle could not appease him, and it was only in the calm and silence of a little wood on the top of the hill that she succeeded in proving to him that there was no great harm in such casual remarks. She made up her mind, however, that in future she would never repeat soldiers' idle comments if they chanced again to reach her ears.

It was dark when they turned homeward, and no soldiers were about, or if they did happen to see one, he was creeping stealthily along on the dark side of the road, too anxious to escape notice himself to give any heed to the couple.

At the door of Madame Blanchet's house they separated. Isabelle began supper alone, while Gauri went to the curé's to apologize for his non-appearance at dinner and say "Good-night." After which he made as if to go up to bed, but as soon as a favourable opportunity occurred, he slipped out of the house and rejoined her.

This new life at Plavignet was very different from the peace and regularity of the villa Madeleine. De Gaurival never knew when he would be free, for, having been befriended by his Commandant and invited to mess with him, he did not wish to offend in any way the man who, in bad times, had so graciously shared all his comparative comfort with him. He could not possibly confess the true state of affairs, for the Commandant, who was supposed to enforce the Colonel's rule of "no women," be it wives, mothers, cousins, or sisters, could hardly be expected to facilitate his cyclist's "affaires de cœur." While the Commandant was away on leave, Gauri had more liberty; but on his return he could only snatch a few hours here and there. Not only was Gauri im-

patient to be with Isabelle for his own sake, but he did not like to think of her waiting and watching for him; and if he had told her to go out, he was doubly anxious, imagining that she might get into trouble with some of the idle soldiers who loitered in and around the village from morning till night. Even if he managed to escape being seen with Isabelle by a non-com. or officer, there was still the risk of being denounced by some soldier. He knew that none of his friends would give him away, but there were men —men who had had no leave for a year—so morose and embittered, that the sight of one of their number walking happily with a woman enraged them with jealousy. Isabelle tried not to be annoyed when having to lunch alone, or pass a whole sunny morning waiting for him to go for a walk with her—but she had expected the Landes life over again, and it certainly was a great disappointment. She, too, was a little nervous of venturing out alone, with so many soldiers about. On a cycle she would have gone quickly through their midst, but on foot she felt herself at a great disadvantage. All the same, she was very interested in what she could see of their life and their ways. There were over a thousand soldiers packed into a village of which the normal number of inhabitants was barely half. Not only had every woman to take in the number of soldiers allotted to her by the Mayor, but she had to make ready for them single-handed, without help from husband or father, who had been called up as a matter of course. To give up a barn or an outhouse to them was less tiresome for a woman than to have them under her own roof, but all the same she could not prevent them going in and out of her yard and kitchen. Though not obliged

to feed them, it was hard to refuse a soldier a little hot water and so on. If Isabelle passed a small farm with "fifteen men of the Xème Company," or some such number, chalked up on the door of the barn, she would, if it was empty, sometimes peep in and look around at all the ingenious contrivances for eating and sleeping. There was nothing provided in the village for the amusement of the men, no club or reading-room. Many of them were quite content with doing nothing, others fished all day, others played *pelote basque* against the walls, or marbles or ninepins.

This game of *pelote*, of which Gauri had so often spoken to her and at which many of the men, coming from Bayonne, were expert, Isabelle always enjoyed watching. Indeed, she was much tempted to try her own hand at it.

Many men bathed in the river, or spent their day reading and writing in the grassy orchards.

De Gaurival and Isabelle went some long walks, but though they tried to avoid the usual haunts of the soldiers, they never felt secure from observation. From one hill they could watch whole squadrons of aeroplanes manœuvring. Isabelle, who had never seen so many together, was enthusiastic in her admiration. They were probably guarding Nancy against an impending attack.

After Isabelle had been a week at Plavignet, de Gaurival made up his mind to risk another night at Nancy. Isabelle drove there one morning in a little broken-down dog-cart, and Gauri followed her. They had a happy twenty-hour hours, bathing in the famous hot-water piscine, dining in a chic restaurant, and sleeping once again in a comfortable room at the Hotel d'Angleterre.

On their return to Plavignet, the risks and tension of their life there weighed on them more than ever. Isabelle thought of taking a villa well outside the village. But though they discussed a thousand plans, none was feasible. The idea of separation, however, had only to present itself to their minds to content them again with their lot.

One day de Gaurival came with the news that early the next morning there was to be a review of the whole regiment, in order to distribute "Croix de Guerre." About forty officers and men were to receive the honour. He was highly pleased that Isabelle should have the good luck to see such a ceremony. He was proud of his regiment.

Isabelle was waked very early the next morning by the voices of soldiers. She jumped out of bed to see what was doing. There was no one immediately beneath her windows, but owing to the thick mist the sound of voices carried farther than usual.

She dressed in as quiet and inconspicuous a manner as possible, hoping to be mistaken for one of the villagers, and when all the companies had gone by to the field where the review was to be held, she started forth with Madame Blanchet and her daughter in the wake of the drum-and-bugle band.

As they walked along they noticed a man behind them, whom Isabelle imagined to be a soldier not taking part for some reason in the ceremony. Later, she discovered it was the Colonel himself walking quietly along alone. He was to distribute the decorations. They arrived at the field, which was some five or six metres below the road and on a level with the broad and sluggish-moving Moselle.

By the time they arrived the battalions and com-

panies had already taken their places, and the band stood just in front, facing this great assembly of men.

It was a beautiful and picturesque scene: the river crossed by its great bridge, and the green wooded hill beyond, all lighted up by the early-rising sun. But the landscape was merely the framework for a sight that thrilled the senses: the great mass of blue-grey uniforms. Then suddenly, on the arrival of the Colonel, the Commandant galloped into the midst and gave the command, "Stand at arms," and simultaneously the bayonets flashed into the air and glistened in the sunshine.

In what perfect unison they executed all the movements! How was it that these men, so recently arrived from the front, were in such splendid form? That a review should stir the imagination of men who have never seen active service, who have never been among falling shells nor so much as seen the entrance to a communication trench, one can understand; they would follow such a ceremony with interest and diligence. But these men knew what war was. They had only just come from a village which had been bombarded night and day. Though they had not been actually in the first-line trenches, they had had all the fatigue work of providing for the men there. They had suffered casualties daily from shell-fire, and had never had a single day or night of assured peace and safety. They had been sleeping packed together in cellars; there also they had spent their leisure hours and taken their meals. No wonder, then, that when they had at last been relieved and had found themselves in this peaceful village, they felt like men who had risen from the dead.

To these men who had toiled in the most dangerous

parts of the front line, would not a review seem child's-play, insipid ?

But no; there was something which stirred them and held them. It was their flag floating before them —the emblem of all for which they were fighting and for which they were ready to suffer any hardship, even death itself.

Isabelle wondered if the sight of their flag impressed the mass of British soldiers to the same degree; there was no doubt of the feeling it inspired in these Frenchmen, all seasoned veterans.

After the Colonel had reviewed the troops, the officers and men from the different companies who were to be decorated came forward and formed themselves in two lines. The band advanced close to them, and the flag with its escort took up a position just in front of them.

The battalions were then moved nearer up, so that they could see the décorés and hear the Colonel's speech. Motionless and silent the men listened. It was a splendid sight. The Colonel did not indulge in the well-turned patriotic speech generally declaimed on these occasions. The language was quaint; all the words would not have been found in a dictionary; but at any rate, every man could hear and appreciate what he said, and they were pleased. They were ready, indeed, to be pleased with any style and any wording. They had been through so much together —men, officers, and Colonel—that anything he said would have been listened to with sympathy.

He had a word for each of the " décorés " as he pinned the Cross to his coat, and a friendly tap on the cheek generally took the place of the usual accolade.

When this ceremony was ended, companies and

battalions rearranged themselves for the march-past. Now they were in one long line of blue, disappearing into the trees towards the left. As they moved forward and passed in front of their Colonel, one saw plainly how glad they were to have this opportunity of honouring their flag, their officers, and their bravest men. This was not a "show" for onlookers, it was a show for themselves, and they delighted in it. With a crowd watching or applauding, the ceremony would have lost half its value and meaning. Isabelle remembered a certain July 19, at Longchamps. That was a mere spectacle; this was real life. Not that the soldiers objected to the little group of spectators standing above them in the road. No doubt they liked, too, to see the children watching or playing, now rolling down the green bank, now audaciously advancing into the field, till sent flying back by a threatening movement of the nearest soldier. Practically all these men were fathers of families, and were longing to see their own little ones again. Many were perhaps thinking of those far away, or of those who had been so cruelly killed in the bombarded district from which they had just come, and who could never again enjoy the beauty of a sunny morning such as this one.

The regiment marched right down the field to the right-hand corner, then up on to the road, and now Isabelle perceived they were going to pass within arm's-length of her and her companions on their way back to the village. First came the band, looking somewhat hot and exhausted—truly they had not spared their lungs; then the men who had won distinction, in a little group apart. Some of them wore not only the green-and-red ribbon which had just been presented to them, but also a medal given by the British War Office. She remembered Gauri's story of Givenchy, when the

regiment went to the aid of some Indian troops and saved a critical situation.

Now that the regiment was so close to her, she was surprised to find how old and worn many of the men looked. There was hardly one who was not past the prime of life. She admired them all the more, for they had paraded like young men. She looked out anxiously for Gauri among them. She wanted to see his strong features and fresh colouring, and note the contrast between him and these others. Once during the review she had caught his eye as she stood on the bank above the field. But after he had ascertained she was there he never looked her way again. Here he came now, cycling rapidly along the narrow strip of road left by the marching men. He whirled past, without appearing to see her, but she knew he had done so. He was evidently carrying a message to the head of the troops, for soon he returned, and took his place again with the other cyclists.

Isabelle walked home among the villagers, in the wake of the regiment. On her return to the house she found Gauri waiting for her. His face was pale and drawn.

"We must separate. We are going to the front again. You must leave me."

"When? How do you know?"

"Everybody is talking of it. This was apparently a last review of the regiment before starting. At latest we shall be off on Monday or Tuesday."

"Oh, Gauri, it's too soon!"

"And you must leave before that. I must see you safely out of the way first. During the last day or two I should not be able to be with you at all."

"That does not matter. I will stay with you till you start, and then return quietly to Paris."

For a minute de Gaurival's face lighted up at the thought of keeping her a little longer than he had intended, but he quickly gave up the idea.

"No, no. It's not possible. If you have difficulties of any sort when I've gone, who will help you? It is not as if I should be one of the last in the regiment to start. I'm not going to trust one of my friends to see you off!"

Isabelle pretended not to notice the bitterness of the last remark. She was only glad now that he had not agreed to let her stay on. For as soon as she had spoken she suddenly pictured herself in trouble with "sauf-conduits," and no explanation to give and nobody to help her.

"Very well. But when must I go?"

"To-day is Thursday. I will try and get leave for one last visit to Nancy on Saturday. They can't refuse as we are just returning to the front. I will stay the night there, see you into the train to Paris in the morning, and get back here midday Sunday."

"And if it should be a false alarm? If, when I have gone, you should find you were staying here another week or ten days? Think of me alone in Paris and you alone here!"

"If we stop by any chance, I will have you back again."

"Oh, Gauri, I don't want to go."

"Please don't make a fuss. You know how I dislike that." Then, dropping to a gentler tone: "We will spend to-day in the woods, if you like. Ask Madame Blanchet for a cold lunch to take with us. As soon as you are ready, start on and wait for me at the usual place beyond the cross-roads."

They had a long, lovely day together, under the trees. Determined not to be sad, they read, they ate, they laughed. But when Gauri sang and Isabelle,

entranced, grew silent, they could not help the sadness of their thoughts.

It was getting dark when they started homeward.

The next day they spent in like manner. They no longer took thought of the risks they ran. They were going to be separated in any case, so they were determined to enjoy these last hours together. Till now they had avoided risks, because to be caught meant not only punishment for Gauri, but Isabelle's departure. Now that she must leave, they took no more care.

These last two days in Plavignet were the happiest of any. They were worth all the rest of their time there put together, for they had both been tortured by being so near to each other, and yet so often for long hours apart.

When Isabelle started for Nancy again in the broken-down dog-cart, Gauri cycled by her side. What did they now care if the poor old driver saw or heard them? Was not everything over now?

Though the hearts of both sank very low when they allowed themselves to think of the short time which still remained to them, they did not show their feelings or allow a sigh to escape. Time enough to cry later, Isabelle thought to herself. Nor did they dare to talk of the next meeting, of how, when, or where it would be. All was indefinite, all was unknown. Once or twice during that day at Nancy Isabelle clung to her lover for a second, but at the station on Sunday morning she appeared collected and calm, and it was only when safely seated in her compartment, and talking to de Gaurival through the window, that the first tears came into her eyes. But as the train moved slowly out of the station and the people on the platform became a misty blur, and she realized that all was really over, she gave way and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER VII

LETTERS DURING THE CHAMPAGNE OFFENSIVE

"*August* 29, 1915.

"OUR wanderings have begun again. A night in the train carried us three to four hundred kilometres away from where we spent our month's rest. The whole regiment, arriving from different directions, re-assembled and spent the whole of yesterday in a little wood. The heat was tropical, and in the evening there was a violent storm with a deluge of rain which poured down on us from seven till eight-thirty. There was no shelter of any sort, and we had to endure this soaking with what stoicism we could till my battalion started off.

"Departure in mud and darkness. The wheels of my bicycle would not turn, my mudguards being so encrusted with mud. What a fine time we had!

"However, towards ten o'clock the moon showed itself and revealed to us a splendid road—not that that diminished our fatigue in the least. I arrived at midnight worn out and wet through from head to foot. I slept in a granary with fifteen or twenty other men, who took refuge there like myself. Think of their lodging us, a regiment of two thousand five hundred men, in a village of *one hundred and sixty-eight inhabitants!*

"I dreamt of the Hotel d'Angleterre, of the little dressing-room with its hot and cold water; I dreamt

of my big house at Algiers. A good bed! Oh, if I had only had that yesterday! But it is wrong of me to complain, for I had a mattress.

I regretted terribly that you did not remain two days longer at Plavignet, for last Tuesday (the day of our departure) you might have seen a magnificent review of the troops which took place only five kilometres away, and of which the papers spoke on Wednesday. The King of the Belgians, Poincaré, and Joffre, were there, and reviewed the whole army corps. To think you might have seen all that, and quite close too! I was extremely disappointed for you.

"We shall probably leave here again this evening for the front. Where? I do not know. In my latest peregrinations, both by car and train, I have passed through country where there has been most deadly fighting, if one may judge by the thousands of shell-holes, and also by the quantities of modest but glorious graves spread over the fields.

"Adieu. I am well. I received your parcel all right."

"*September* 3, 1915.

"I wrote to you five or six days ago to tell you that I had left the place where we rested for a month. Oh, much regretted Plavignet!

"I write to you again to confirm it, and to drive away any thoughts you may have of returning to see me there.

"I have no news of you, but then I have none from anyone: our mail is wandering about after us. We are promised it every day, but it has not reached us yet.

"For a whole week we have journeyed on and on, resting and endeavouring to get dry by day, and

continuing our road at nightfall. I wrote you a line about our first day's journey. The next was very much harder; instead of twelve kilometres we did twenty-two, marching from ten o'clock in the evening to two o'clock in the morning in pouring rain and violent wind. Poor men! They were dead-beat and soaked through.

"The next day, on again in motor-buses, travelling at night. We were put down at midnight in a pine-wood, where we had to sleep 'à la belle étoile.' As a matter of fact, there was not a single 'étoile,' for it was raining. And for the last three days we have been here, the whole of the 442nd living in a plantation of young pine-trees only two or three metres high. The men are in tents, and it is already cold at night. I myself sleep in a dug-out which has been dug fifty centimetres below the level of the ground, and covered with earth and pine-branches. It serves as orderly room for the battalion staff during the day, and I, with my friend Payas, sleep there at night. Fortunately we have mattresses. Payas, who looks after the horses, is a very clever fellow; he is both poet and artist.

"This country has its charm in fine weather, but in rain it is horrible. This is indeed war. But I ought to be more than satisfied, for yesterday I discovered, during a heavy shower, that our shelter was watertight! We spent the whole of yesterday in making a door.

"The Commandant and doctor sleep in a similar dug-out near by. The same cook I told you about continues to cook for us, but with what difficulty! No more new bread—no more *café au lait* in the early morning! We eat soldiers' bread, toasted. But how

can I complain of anything when I know that the men of the regiment are working so terribly hard, digging day and night (the whole night through) under shell-fire less than five kilometres from here ?

" The worst feature is the lack of water. It has to be brought two kilometres. If you had seen me the day after our arrival, going for provisions to the neighbouring village crowded with soldiers, you would not have recognized me. I had a stick, and looked like a tramp; I had not washed or shaved for four days.

" Just now there has been a bit of excitement in the camp. A shell came our way and fell not far off—the first salute. We hear again the well-known whistling, but after the shelling we had in the north we feel here secure and serene in comparison. . . . Advienne que pourra !

" This country is very quaint. Imagine Lavoudère, with the same sloping hills but on a vaster scale. The plateau here has just the same paths, like ribbons running over it, made by the numberless convoys. Here and there are little plantations of young pine-trees. In them are huts and shelters of every sort and kind, containing convoys and horses. I have never seen such a curious scene.

" The day before yesterday I went to a village twelve kilometres away, where I expected to find everything I wanted. It was not only deserted, but completely destroyed. I was lucky enough though, to meet there some of our Colonial infantry.

" This morning I cycled forty kilometres, from eight a.m. to one p.m. Forty kilometres would have been nothing in dry weather, but I had to ride mostly over fields and along muddy paths, and I had to stop

every half-hour to clear the mud from the mudguards. Apart from this, the road, when I could take it, was everywhere crowded with troops mounted and unmounted.

"I once had to walk for an hour between two interminable convoys which were passing one another. I met other cyclists and motor-cyclists who were entangled in this medley of troops, horses, and vehicles. It gave an idea of the vastness of this great war.

"I am not allowed, as you know, to give you a hint of our whereabouts: it is formally forbidden, and punishments have been showered upon the indiscreet. It was a great joy to me this morning to sit on the top of a hill and admire the plain where a former great battle was fought, and where the armies of the Revolution won a great victory over the allies. The glory with which they then endowed France endows her still.

"The English say that the French soldier is *débrouillard*. I do not know if they really mean it, but if they saw the way the poilus of the 442nd have settled themselves in these plantations in three days they would have a proof of the truth of their saying. Little huts and dug-outs are everywhere, half-hidden by the green undergrowth. Some have names—'La Huchette,' 'Villa of the Flying Bugs,' etc. Ours is called, 'What do you clean your teeth with?' in memory of a story which I will tell you later.

"What more can I say to you? That it is cold at night, and that the *passe-montagne* which I have asked you to send me would be very useful just now? Fortunately I have my Basque cap, and with a thick vest and pants and woollen socks, and over all a good rug, I do not suffer too much from the cold in my

dug-out. But what will it be like in a month? Let us hope we shall be no longer here. Ah, this time it is really war! It has been all too good up to now, in spite of the 'marmites' near Arras.

"And what more! I am quite well—mentally and physically. No rheumatism, no fever. And I can still, as in those first weeks, smoke good cigars and sip fine cognac, which my mother finds means to send me.

"Adieu to you. You will not now say I do not write to you. I wished especially to tell you that I am far from the region where we were lately, and where there were soft beds and white sheets. That was too good to last!

"I have just heard from Algiers of the death of de Saurel, killed at Carency."

"*September* 19 7 *a.m.*

"MA CHÈRE AMIE,

"I had meant to write you a long letter yesterday or this morning, but it was impossible. Yesterday I was tired out with numberless messages and errands, and contented myself with merely lying in my hammock after dinner, and dreaming. And this morning the camp is upside-down with all the stir and bustle of departure. For we strike camp this evening and go up to the firing-line. Special clothes, tools, and munitions are being issued. It is the eleventh change for the battalion; the fifth or sixth for me in fifteen days. But all this is in the day's work.

"My letter must be short, then, but I have decided to enclose in it, contrary to my custom and principles, a few letters lately received. One from my friend Augier, one from Charles, and one from Mr. Roux, who, as you see, speaks of my possible recall from

the army at his urgent request. Say nothing to persuade me, for I am answering him — 'J'y suis, j'y reste.' This is not precisely the moment to take refuge in civil life again, though the thought of winter, far more than anything else, fills me with dread.

"We shall probably change our camp very often during the next few days, and I am perhaps wrong to enclose letters to you. Please return them quickly, registering your letter. Do not take advantage of this to worry me again with letters addressed to you. I again forbid it.

"Five or six days ago two parcels reached me containing your two cakes sent off on June 30. In spite of the delay—three months—they arrived in perfect condition, and we had a royal feast at our mess. We did such honour to them that two days later nothing was left! It is probable that the cooking personnel did their share in bringing about this rapid disappearance, for you know that I never put my safe or cellar under lock and key.

"Thank you a thousand times.

"Yesterday your little case containing toilet necessaries reached me. It will be very useful. It will go into my pack quite well, and arrives *à point.* The *passe-montagne* is very nice too, but in that my family had fortunately forestalled you, and had lit on the happy idea of sending a dark brown one, remembering that I lived underground and in woods, while *you* sent me something fit for Chamonix! I thank you none the less for all these parcels, and also for the English papers, which the Commandant and I read with interest. Thank you again many times.

"I am very well. We have all felt very melancholy

these last days. But now everything is in full swing again. The wooded hills around us were never so unusual as now. They were never so thickly peopled, the roads never so crowded. And now once more begins the great moving forward. To-night we shall be six kilometres nearer the firing-line. And after that ! !

" Something startling and new is going to happen—something of which I am forbidden to speak to you if I want this letter to reach you safely. We needed something to distract us and raise our spirits.

" Do not worry about me. There is no need to tell you again of my confidence in my good star; you must not forget, too, that our regiment is not for the present intended to attack. Advienne que pourra ! If, contrary to all my calculations, a shell misses its true mark and throws me face-to-face with ' last moments,' I wish to tell you that in thinking of you I will make a point of remembering only the good hours which I owe to you, and shall forgive you the rest. Remember that.

" But I do not wish to linger for a second on such a contingency.

" I am in good form, and could not be in better health. Everything around me is in motion and gay to-day. The sun is radiant and driving away the dampness of the woods and the dullness of our thoughts.

" Hurrah ! We are once more strapping up our kit-bags, and my bicycle is once more equipped for war. And without cotton-wool in our ears, we are going to press forward towards the great music and see what is happening, and more especially what will happen.

" Au revoir, mon amie. Do not work too hard,

do not worry, and above all live good hours in the sun—enjoy it quietly for you and for me.

"I am called away; no means of writing more or reading this over."

"*September* 19.
"*In haste.*

"I wrote to you this morning enclosing letters for you to see. Don't forget to return them—I did not tell you that I had received all your letters. I am answering *the last.* The one before needed no answer —very much the contrary. And besides, I don't understand a word of your French!

"In my letter just sent off, you will find photos taken by the Commandant. One is of our shelter, another of Mass held among the pines by a priest who is an orderly of our battalion. I have only one copy of each, and I send them to you.

"Write distinctly, for the continual change of address will probably cause delay in the postal service.

"Advienne que pourra for that, as for all the rest!

"When shall I get leave? If only we had the water of the good Moselle! Au revoir."

"CHÈRE MADAME, "*September* 26.

"I send you my salutations after the great day of yesterday. A day of rain and mud, but a day of glory. A day of wounded, but above all of German prisoners. The duty of our battalion is to receive prisoners as they come out of the communication trenches. We received and sent off more than two thousand yesterday up to nine p.m. There were thirty-four officers, of whom two were majors. This morning at eight a.m., when I left, over a thousand more had already arrived. We are really living now: all is right."

" *September* 30.

" I wrote you a card the day after the first great attack. A few days beforehand we had known it was pending. I have not time to give you all the details of those great days, but I enclose my diary, which please send back to me as soon as you have read it.

" *September* 23.—The 3rd Battalion leave for Wargemoulin. One shelter for the whole *popote*. The order of the Generalissimo is read out to us, indicating under what conditions the offensive is to be undertaken. His optimism !

" *September* 24.—We move to Laval, where we hear we are to take charge of the German prisoners. The Colonel and other battalions go on to the Ravin de Marson. In the sheds of Laval we find the 79th Regiment of Nancy—20th corps. We assemble, and the Captain reads us Joffre's *ordre du jour* for the next day's attack—' Soldiers of the Republic, for the triumph of right and liberty,' etc. The ceremony thrills us.

" I recognize my friend Dambier of Algiers, who is now second-lieutenant in the 79th. We chat for a minute.

" The cannonade has continued now for three days and three nights. There is a full moon. Every unit is to be at its post at three a.m.

" *September* 25.—It is now raining, after fine weather for twenty days previously. Happily for our life in the woods of Hill 192 it was so. The rain makes no difference in the plans for the attack. At eleven o'clock the first prisoners arrive, brought by men of the 442nd, who were at the Ravin de Marson. They are in batches of from fifty to one hundred, in the

afternoon of from two hundred to three hundred. Territorials of the 315th and the 2nd Dragoons take them from us and conduct them to the Joffre camp, nine kilometres behind.

" It is dark at seven o'clock, but prisoners still come in. Men of the 442nd have to help to escort them and go on to Somme Tourbe, though they have had nothing to eat all day. No one grumbles, however, for it is a good haul for the first day. In mud, rain, and darkness, I tear about with an electric lamp in my hand. The prisoners are formed up on the road. I conduct some officers, who have just come in, from the tail to the head of the column.

" In the darkness we count the prisoners: thirty-four officers, of whom there are two Majors; two thousand one hundred and sixty soldiers and non-coms. —not bad for the first day !

" One of the Majors, after arrogant behaviour all day, at last asks for food. He devours our soldiers' bread eagerly.

" We hear that there are three thousand prisoners at Joffre's camp. For the first time we receive no newspapers. But do we need them to-day ?

" *September* 26.—Two hundred more prisoners arrived in the night and slept in a shed. Many were wounded. They were given water and attended to by the doctors. To-day there are already eight hundred. I am sent on a message eight kilometres away. Rain and terrible mud. I ride in the midst of artillery, motors, cyclists, the 13th and 14th Dragoons, and the 122nd and 322nd regiments.

" Towards the end of the day fewer prisoners come in, but our wounded, alas ! are numerous. Poor fellows ! they have to wait their turn. However,

there is less crush and muddle than on the first day, and no lack of motor ambulances.

"I watch some of the operations. There are a great many only slightly wounded. They never talk of their wounds, only of the attack and the different actions. Many have been wounded before, for they all come from picked regiments."

"*September* 27.—Not so many prisoners. In the morning I went to Somme Tourbe, where I found the *Matin*, and read the Communiqué of the 26th announcing twelve thousand prisoners!

"4 a.m.—The cannonade is terrible, and we fancy there is to be a strong attack on the Butte du Mesnil. There will again be many wounded, but lots of prisoners too, I hope. This horrible rain has begun again.

"Saw a good many wounded from Biarritz and Bayonne. Saw poor Lieutenant G. on the operating table. Heard that Adamot had been killed by a shell. Poor Adamot!

"We have all been given the new Infantry helmet. I have worn a sun helmet for ten years, but this is a heavier kind! The wounded say it will save a lot of lives. It is indispensable against shrapnel.

"*September* 29.—Since last night, the Commandant, the doctor and Adjutant have been at the Ravin de Marson in a shell-proof dug-out. Payas and I remain at Laval. I go to fetch the newspapers every day at Somme Tourbe, take them to the Ravin, and return to Laval for my midday meal. Yesterday I did thirty kilometres in thick, sticky mud. It was still possible yesterday, but this morning the mud was dryer and stickier still, and it was pitiful to see the cyclists on the road. I had to leave my cycle at Wargemoulin and take a communication trench. How long

it is, and what a fearful view of war does this Ravin de Marson present! What a confusion of soldiers and motor-lorries all struggling in this horrible mud! How many cemeteries! At one place there was a long row of corpses which there had been no time to bury. I counted at least thirty. And how many dead horses have been left by the side of the road!

"All these scenes I saw to the accompaniment of guns of all sorts. There are batteries on either side of the Ravin, 75's, 105's, short 120's, guns and trench-mortars of 270. All these were firing at the same time, and quite close to me. The noise was infernal.

"When I reached my Commandant two hundred metres beyond the famous Beauséjour farm, I gave him his correspondence, newspapers, and a copy of a telegram which had been shown me by a motor-cyclist, saying that part of the seventh army corps had broken through East of Rheims. Let us hope it is true.

"'The cuisine roulante' of the 12th being there, I asked Sergeant Barthe if he could give me a lift as far as Laval, or at any rate to Wargemoulin, where I had left my cycle. My feet were painful, and I had been waist-deep in mud.

"Barthe acceded to my request, and six of us seated ourselves on the top of the camp kitchen. We had to hold on tight, for there were huge ruts and holes in the Ravin. I was just getting used to the situation when there was a whistle of a shell, which burst thirty metres in front of us. We see soldiers rushing to shelter. The driver decides to go on and whips up his horses. We go on, therefore, but—bang! bang! bang! We realize quickly, and not without a thrill, that the Boches are shelling the Ravin by sections fifty metres

by fifty metres, in the direction in which we are moving. It is not at all amusing! A third shell bursts behind and on a higher level than our kitchen, but hardly ten metres away. We all lower our heads instinctively (I have not my helmet), and we question each other as we still drive on. Nobody has been touched. The sergeant tells us that both horses are wounded, however: one is bleeding quite fast, and has certainly been caught by a piece of shrapnel; the other has a slight wound near its hoof. They gallop on all the same, and bring us into safety. In the evening I saw the little piece of lead which was taken from the white horse."

"MA CHÈRE AMIE, "*October* 19, 1915.

"All your letters have reached me safely, as well as the chocolates and newspapers. Thank you. It is true that I have not written to you for some three weeks. You know why.

"Your last letter received yesterday afternoon at six o'clock shows me that you are worried about me. It is only this anxiety of yours on my behalf which forces me to write to you in Paris. I hasten, therefore, to let you know that I am very well, though having for all shelter these damp nights a hole in this chalky soil covered with tent canvas.

"I will say no more; you know why; as also you know that I will be pleased to write to you more fully when you *have returned to your family* in England. I am quite well."

"CHÈRE MADAME, "*November* 4, 1915.

"I received yesterday your letter and your card dated from London announcing your safe arrival. Both had been censored by the military authorities,

as you may see by the enclosed envelope, which I return. This is to let you know that it is better not to write very personal letters during a war in which the censor exercises every right.

"I am in good health, and still cyclist to Commandant Adour.

"After having passed an arduous month in woods or in chalky cliffs, under shell-fire, continually changing camp and sleeping in so-called shelters, a whole month of hurrying through communication trenches or along roads—horrible when muddy—my Colonel has been sent to rest here at a place ten kilometres to the rear, for six days—that is, till the ninth. I came with him, of course, and here I am, in a big village of great historical interest, just now overrun with troops. Our accommodation is shocking; we sleep on the ground on straw, and rats as big and heavy as cats jump on us every minute if we do not leave a lamp alight. Charming 'rest'!—and yet just now we are content, for the sun is beginning to show itself and it is not quite so cold. The market square is always crowded with soldiers, and a military band plays every day to distract us from the cannonade which, however, is always thundering away at no great distance.

"I am not going to give you a thousand and one details of the life I have led during the last fortnight. I made a few notes of anything interesting I saw, and you may read them when an opportunity occurs for us to meet. But when? The 'permissions' of the 442nd have not begun again, and I can hardly hope my turn will come round for several months.

"I have had my share of shells lately and, I tell you frankly, I have just as much respect for them as their destructive power inspires. What I really dread

much more, though, is the approach of winter, and the thought of passing the night to all intents and purposes in the open—I, who feel the cold so much. In the hope of avoiding it, I have made an application to enter what you call the Motor Transport Service. If I am taken, I shall doubtless be sent to Versailles or a *parc automobile*. I will let you know, whatever it may be.

"I received your letters safely, including all the mass of correspondence which you still persist in sending me. From them I see that you are developing a taste for life in Paris—it is a taste which hardly pleases me. Nor do I like hearing the jumble of names, none of which I know, mentioned in these letters. You must do as you like, of course. As for me, I have other preoccupations, and at times live through moments which are by no means particularly joyous.

"I have had no news of Hallon for the last two months at least. I discovered from one of his former letters that he was in Nancy in August, and that therefore I might have had the chance to meet him there. Lately I came across Robin's regiment. After a long search, one misty morning, I finally discovered his company. But *Sergeant* Robin (he is not nineteen yet) had been wounded in the head, taken to Tahure, and sent on to Paris. He has just written to me. His wound is fortunately not serious, and his father will be proud of him."

"417 T.M., PAR B.C.M.,
"PARIS,
"*November* 22, 1915.

"I have just passed my examination as a motor-driver —driving, theory, running repairs, etc. I will write to you as soon as I know what is going to happen to me."

" *December* 5, 1915.

" CHERE MADAME,

" Yesterday evening I received your letter and card of November 29. For at least a fortnight I had had no news from you—a thing which will doubtless happen often in the Motor Transport Service, where we never remain long in the same place.

" On November 26 a friend of mine, the Adjutant of the 442nd, wrote that he was sending on ten letters —his letter reached me on the 29th—but none of the ten letters in question have come yet, which is somewhat annoying.

" I am by no means in Paris. I am, in fact, a good distance away. Understand that all letters for the Transport Service, whether for drivers or mechanics, pass through B.C.M., Paris (Bureau Central Militaire), T.M. (Transport Matériel), S.P. (Section Parc), T.P. (Transport Personnel).

" You know by now that that is all I can tell you of my address—it is still forbidden to mention one's camp or position, even if behind the front.

" After having been four days in a neighbouring *parc* (workshops for repairing and overhauling motor-cars), my car, an enormous limousine Gobron of 35 h.p., was sent here to S.P. 31, where I have been living for the last ten days. I came here in a tempest of rain and snow in the night, my car taken in tow by another. My car is not yet fit for service. When it will be ready, I do not know. Where it will be sent, I do not know. Meanwhile, like all drivers here whose cars are under repair, I do sentry duty and fatigue work. This morning from seven to eleven I was sawing and chopping wood, and I am beginning to be quite expert.

" During the very hard frosts of last week (7° to 10° below zero), I was on guard from eight to ten in the evening and from two to four a.m. I must tell you I did not suffer from the cold, though you would hardly believe what I had on me—three pairs of socks, of which two were woollen, thick felt slippers and *sabots*, three vests, my coat, my overcoat, a muffler, and a *passe-montagne !* Oh !

" There is a little town here with shops, and a hotel where, for seven francs a day, one can get pretty decent meals. a bed, and a wash. It is paradise compared with the straw and rats of three weeks ago.

" I am in extremely good health, and absolutely cured of all the bad effects of my fourteen years in Africa.

" You seem to wish to return to Paris. Come back, then, if you want to so much. I am counting on passing through there very soon, as the second lot of ' permissions ' has begun. In five days I shall have had six months at the front, and shall then immediately apply for leave. I hope to see my family in December, but I cannot be any more definite about that than about the place to which I shall be sent on leaving here.

" If you do come back to France, let me know, so that I can write a line to your Paris address. I cannot give you my real address, but perhaps among your military acquaintances in Paris you can find it out. I suppose, however, you will prefer to spend your Christmas with your family, which is quite right. Tell me this in your next letter. Unfortunately it takes four or five days for correspondence to reach me from England.

" Yesterday drivers who could speak English were asked to volunteer for the American ' service sanitaire.'

I was tempted to apply, but the chance of leave so soon prevented me. You would not recognize me now, for I wear my *sabots* and my *bleu* all day. It would be a sad disillusion for you, would it not?

"MADAME, "*December* 18, 1915.

"I was glad to hear that you had arrived safely in Paris. But what I feared happened yesterday, and will doubtless often happen again. I am no longer at S.P. 31, but have returned to near my old quarters at T.M. 417. I was given half an hour to collect my belongings and clear out. Happily I found something to eat and sleep on in my old garret. Since my last occupation of this room a piece of wall has fallen in, and the hole has been filled up with straw. But I have a bed, which counts for much, for they are very scarce here.

"And you, where are you and what are you doing? I hope you have not tried to join me, but have remained in Paris, and that this letter will find you there. In any case I hope to see you, for I have decided to ask for my leave at once, and will let you know the probable date.

"I was disgusted at having to leave the big village where there was an hotel. Here there is nothing—a tiny place and crowds of troops. Not a room free.

"I am writing on my bed, having no table. Excuse me. A bientôt, I hope."

"*December* 19, 1915.

"I am not without anxiety on your account, wondering if you have left Paris. I hope not, for my leave is granted *en principe* for Wednesday the 22nd. I say *en principe*, because in the Transport Service one must expect to change one's quarters not only

from day to day, but from hour to hour. However, it is practically certain that I shall take a military train on Wednesday morning, which will bring me to Paris in the afternoon about three o'clock.

"I even hope to take an ordinary passenger train at seven a.m., which arrives in Paris at eleven thirty-nine a.m. Probably I shall get permission to take that one. If you can, come to the Gare de l'Est on Wednesday at eleven thirty-nine, and if I am not there it will mean that I shall not arrive till the afternoon, and will come to you immediately. I shall go to the Hôtel de Calais if I am able to remain a few hours in Paris. If I am forced to change my plans, I will try to let you know at once, but I do not command the post office, as you know.

"Received this morning your card written between Charing Cross and Folkestone.

"A très bientôt, then, I hope. Paris, eleven thirty-nine, Wednesday, or during the afternoon of the same day."

"CHÈRE MADAME, "*December* 20, 1915.

"I have just received your letter of the 17th, which makes me hope that you will have remained in Paris.

"Nothing is changed up to the present as to the day of my leave. I am still supposed to be leaving the day after to-morrow, Wednesday. I start at five a.m. to catch a train at a station ten kilometres away from here.

"*Unfortunately* I am told that I shall not be allowed to pass through Paris, and that I must take a military train passing by Troyes and Orléans, and from there another military train to Bordeaux. A pleasant look-out, isn't it ?

"However, I am still manœuvring to be allowed to pass through Paris, and, believe me, *I shall do all I possibly can to succeed.*

"But as there is a doubt, let us make plans. Listen. If you have not seen me in Paris before five o'clock on Wednesday, take the night train to Bordeaux (the second is about nine-fifty, I think), and go straight to Biarritz. Take rooms at the same hotel as before, and wait for me there.

"From what I am told, my military train arrives at Orléans about eleven p.m. We leave again during the night, and should be in Bordeaux in the morning. In that case, I should arrive in Biarritz some time on Thursday.

"Do you understand? Do as I tell you.

"But I still hope to be in Paris Wednesday, eleven-thirty, or at latest during the afternoon.

"Then you understand!—Paris Wednesday, or Biarritz Thursday.

"I am very cold, and in a great hurry. A bientôt!"

"*December* 21.

"CHÈRE MADAME,

"It is hellish luck! With others I have received orders to leave immediately for another secteur. My leave was signed for to-morrow. Now it is post-poned. It will of course follow me, but I don't know when I shall get it.

"So you see! you have not prayed enough for me, and, above all, you did not act when you had the chance. And so I remain in the ranks like all the rest.

"I am trying by all means in my power to let you know of this delay in time, and thus to annul my letter of yesterday, which told you to go to Biarritz."

"*December* 23, 1915.

"I hope with all my heart that you will have heard in time that my leave is postponed, and that you are still in Paris, and therefore happy, as it seems to please you so much of late.

"As for me, the 21st, the day before yesterday, I travelled from two p.m. to eight p.m. in a meat car —a Paris ex-motor-bus, and on arriving in this little village, where my section now is, half dead with cold (it was a snowy, freezing day), I had to sleep on straw in a shed where the wind penetrated both walls and roof. But it doesn't matter!

"Yesterday, the 22nd, when my leave should have sent me on my way towards Paris and Biarritz, I started at six a.m. on the Saurer car No. 6, a five-ton lorry, which I drive with a comrade. And we came back to the place where we were so shelled before, driving about fifty kilometres in all. There we discharged our load—pine-trunks—in horrible mud, and came back to our camp at five p.m., soaked and frozen. Here I slept on straw again, without being able to get thoroughly dry.

"My leave has not arrived yet, and as the section is going to change its camp and move into another part in a few days, there is little chance of its reaching me before we start.

"Therefore I must be patient, and I do not now count on seeing Biarritz again before January.

"I have just read in the paper the speech of an English M.P., Stanton, which gives me real pleasure. Here at last is a man who speaks common sense and tells the truth. It is time!

"Adieu. I am not a little disgusted to be still living in a village where there is absolutely nothing,

where one must be satisfied with straw and one's *gamelle*, and where one's whole outlook is bounded by cold, snow, and rain.

"I am awaiting my leave with impatience. I did so want to have a bath!

"P.S.—Happy Christmas to you! Mine will be spent in an atmosphere of straw and dirt. But nevertheless, my leave should come quickly. I have a right to expect it."

CHAPTER VIII

HIS FIRST SIX DAYS' LEAVE

It was six o'clock when Isabelle reached the Rue du Bouclier on her return to the flat on Christmas Eve. As she entered the hall, a little dazzled by the bright light after walking in the damp and dark street, the concierge opened her glass door and said:

"Madame, un officier vient de vous demander. Il m'a donné une lettre pour vous."

"Un officier? Qui?" Before she had said the words she knew it was Gauri, and said: "Où est-il? Dites vite."

"Il sort à l'instant."

Isabelle dashed out into the damp street again. She peered down the pavement to right and left, then seeing a figure some twenty yards away she began running towards it. It was not Gauri, and she retraced her footsteps quickly. Where was he? She must read his letter. Just as she was about to reenter the house a man crossed the road.

"Gauri, you've come!"

"Yes, I'm here. I've managed it. We're going to spend Christmas together after all."

"Gauri, I'm so glad to see you."

"Get into the taxi quickly."

"Oh, you've got a taxi—that's how I didn't see you."

"Do you often run after people in the street like that?"

"Directly the concierge said somebody had asked for me, I knew it was you."

As soon as the taxi moved forward, Gauri drew Isabelle towards him and crushed her in his arms. Then holding her still against him with one arm, he felt her down from head to foot with his free hand—her hair, her face, her shoulder, her arm, her ankle, her foot.

"Est-ce vous? C'est vrai? Est-ce vous?"

He loosened his hold a little, and Isabelle panted. "Gauri, take care; you nearly killed me! I couldn't breathe. You don't know your strength."

"And what if I killed you quite? What if I finished with you once and for all?"

"If you killed me, Gauri, you would not have me any more."

"Nor would any other."

He seized her again, and his muscles seemed of iron. She did not struggle, for she feared a still tighter grip. As suddenly as he had seized her, as suddenly did he thrust her back into the corner of the carriage.

"Where were you coming from when you returned home?"

"I had been to see Captain Ferrat at the hospital. His wife telephoned to me to go there this morning."

"Do you often go walking in the dark streets alone?"

"It was still light when I took the métro. at the Porte Dauphine."

"Ferrat? Ferrat? Do I know him?"

"I don't think so. He was wounded two months ago."

De Gaurival tried to scrutinize Isabelle's expression as he asked these questions. From time to time

bright flashes of light penetrated the darkness, for they had now reached the Boulevards.

The taxi drew up in front of "Old England."

"Wait there a minute. I must make some purchases."

Isabelle leant back in the dark corner of the carriage, and while looking at the shop and the passers-by, whose figures were clearly outlined against the lighted windows, she tried to realize all that had happened within the last few minutes. Only one hour ago she had been recasting her life with an aching heart. She had tried to think things out philosophically, but there was no understanding the tricks which fate played on the lives of some individuals! She, a married woman, had accepted a lover; but she had fled from him when he longed for her most, and when the way had apparently been clear for them to attain all their desires. She had followed her husband in a fit of remorse or from a sudden impulse, and had, by so doing it, for ever alienated her lover. Her husband had for no apparent reason left her behind, alone in France, just when she needed him most. She had returned to her lover in spite of the fact that he could not forgive her, and it sometimes seemed to her, as time went on, that their love made them more enemies than friends. And what was happening now? She had but just fled from the Christmas family party in England to come back to him, and he had been prevented from joining her. Oh, these cross purposes in mind and movement! And then when everything seemed more than ever wrong, suddenly this miracle had happened! He had come! He had come when she was no longer expecting him. This one week would make up for all the rest! It was worth going through all for this one miraculous minute.

She reflected that they would in all probability take the night train to Biarritz, and she began to consider details of packing and the postponement of engagements for the next ten days.

Gauri came swinging out of the shop with quick and decided steps.

"What are you writing there?"

"I was making a list of the people I am to write or telephone to if we are leaving Paris to-night."

"Let me see."

Isabelle drew the slip of paper from her bag again and handed it to him.

He glanced at it and returned it without a word. He gave another address to the chauffeur, and the taxi moved forward again.

"Que c'est bon, Paris! Que c'est bon! Look at the lights! Look at the people! The display in the shops, the buying and selling, the feeling of comfort and civilization—it is all like the memory of a dream! Have I indeed seen all this before or not?" Then, changing his tone: "How long will it take you to pack? If we go back to your flat now, can you get to my hotel with your luggage in time for dinner? I am sorry to be so prosaic in the midst of all this enchantment, but I am most awfully hungry."

"I can pack in an hour."

"Very well, we will go straight back to the Rue du Bouclier."

"Are we taking the night train?"

"I shall see—you needn't worry about that."

"It starts at nine."

"Yes, I know." He gave her directions where to meet him at the hotel. He kissed her more gently, and when they reached the Rue du Bouclier, she felt

he was loath to let her out of his sight even for an hour. He said nothing, however, and helped her to alight.

Isabelle's packing was quickly done. The maid hurried here and there—that she should have an unexpected holiday during Christmas week was such good news to her that she evinced no curiosity. Besides, she had prepared for Isabelle's departure already twice within a week, so that this sudden decision did not come as a great surprise.

When de Gaurival and Isabelle were half through their meal in the hotel restaurant, Gauri said quietly:

"We are not going to Biarritz, after all. I found a letter here from my mother begging me to go to Nice, as she has gone there suddenly to visit my sister, who is ill. I have decided to do as she asks me. I do not think there will be any difficulty about the change of address on my 'permission' under the circumstances."

"Oh, Gauri—I wanted to go to Biarritz!"

"So did I—I'm very disappointed."

"Well, let's go all the same. You will see your mother on your next leave from the front."

"I told you it was decided. I've already telegraphed to her."

"I have been looking forward to this visit to Biarritz for so long. It is too bad! I wanted to see the places where you were born, where you went to school, all your familiar haunts."

"I was ready to show them all to you."

"It is too, too bad!"

"Enough!" Then he added in a gentle tone: "As long as we spend my leave together, I suppose that is the essential thing."

"Yes—of course. Are we going to start to-night all the same?"

"No. We shall at least have the solace of sleeping here. I did not feel inclined to spend a night in the train."

Before going to bed Gauri wanted to have another look at Paris. But at nine o'clock the Boulevards were already dark and empty, and they hurried back to the hotel.

During the long journey in the train, de Gaurival told Isabelle many a story of the front—of hardships, of acts of valour, tales of endurance and of heroism. Isabelle's eagerness to hear all, to understand all, to grasp situations, made even him who told the stories see facts in a fresh light. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and her questions brought back to de Gaurival's mind incidents which he would otherwise have forgotten. Isabelle had heard of course many stories of the front, but always from the lips of officers. Now she got not only the point of view of the common soldier, but also that of an educated man able to judge and understand. . . . It was quite a different story. Gauri told her how the men, in spite of their bravery and enthusiasm in danger, at times of inaction often said, "This is an officers' war," or, "If the officers were paid like us, the war would now be over!" They were thinking of farm or shop where work was at a standstill.

At Nice, de Gaurival took rooms at the Grand Hotel, where they had a magnificent view over the sea, the Promenade, the Place Masséna. He engaged a bedroom and sitting-room in his own name, a bedroom and bathroom in hers.

As soon as they were alone, de Gaurival drew up the heavy wooden blind, and they leant on the iron

rail and gazed at the wonderful scene. Was there ever before such a blue sea, such a radiant sun, such a clear sky, such a picture of wealth and beauty, as was here presented on the broad promenade! Here, surely, was a country at peace!—the war seemed far, far away in quite another world. If the nations waging this war had lived in such a climate, surely it would have been impossible for them to have ever planned or organized it!

De Gaurival and Isabelle spent some very happy and peaceful days on this wonderful southern shore. They strolled along the esplanade, mixing in the crowd, yet hardly aware of a soul. They explored the town and shops, and de Gaurival was quick at discovering little presents and souvenirs which would please her. He was very gentle, very soothing, very affectionate. Every little attention was to Isabelle like water to a thirsty man. Occasionally she wondered at his kindly mood. Was it the war that had so softened him?—and under the influence of sunshine and peace, was he returning to his former self? Or was it the palm-trees and this tropical vegetation which brought back to him that magic time when they first met in Algiers? In part it might be the daily separation for an hour or two, when he was forced to let her out of his sight, for he was determined to visit his mother every day, and to take one meal at his sister's house. Isabelle did not mind these two hours of solitude. They gave her time to put her ideas in order, to remember where she was, to take stock of her surroundings, for her lover carried her to such heights and depths that she needed to be alone to recover breath.

Each time he said, "I must go now," she felt the

wrench for him as much as if he had given expression to the pain he endured; and when he came back she was also quite aware of his effort to prevent his joy and eagerness from becoming apparent.

Not only did he hate an hour's separation for his own sake, but he blamed himself for not devoting himself exclusively to her. Was it all these things, or one of them, Isabelle wondered, which made him so much more thoughtful and considerate at Nice?

But as is so often the case, when the sun is brightest a dark cloud suddenly appears.

De Gaurival had on several occasions hired a car, and together they had visited Cannes, Monte Carlo, Mentone, and St. Raphael. One day it was decided to go still farther afield. They were to lunch at Beauvallon, a big hotel beyond St. Maxime on the southern road, between St. Raphael and Toulon.

They both loved motoring, and the quick movement, the glorious scenery, elated them; they never felt themselves so beyond the reach of conventionalities as when rushing along a new and unexplored road.

They stopped a few minutes at St. Raphael to watch the hydroplanes, which were buzzing like great dragon-flies over the bay. Occasionally the planes dipped into the water, and so merged was the blue of the sky in the blue of the sea, that one could only tell they were actually in the water when the white foam dashed up round them. In such beautiful surroundings it was a wonderful sight, and they found it impossible to believe that they were watching instruments of war and not of pleasure.

"I want to know an aviator—I must get to know an aviator!" Isabelle suddenly exclaimed.

"Perhaps you wish *me* to introduce one to you."

De Gaurival's voice so changed as he said this, it was so bitter and sarcastic, that Isabelle felt as if he had struck her. With a great effort, however, she managed to say: "Yes, if you could find one who would be willing to take me up as a passenger."

"That is impossible in war-time." De Gaurival also tried to divert her attention from his sudden outburst.

They drove on again, and the beauty of the scenery on that glorious sunny day soon restored peace. They stopped for a few minutes at St. Aygulf, and walked down one of the broad avenues leading to the sea. The mimosas which already showed their yellow blossoms here and there made a green arch over their heads.

Both were struck by the charm and mystery of this little village. Every villa was surrounded by such a big garden that it was never possible to get more than a glimpse of it through the thick growth of trees and bushes. The spot might well have been chosen and laid out specially for lovers who, for a space, wished to fly from the world and its conventionalities, and enjoy nature in solitude. Both thought, as they peeped through gaps in the hedge, of the bliss that might be theirs if they could but live in such a retreat for a few months.

The road ended in a railing which topped a high wall built up from the beach. The stretch of fine yellow sand was very inviting—a contrast to the grey stones on the beach at Nice. A broad, shallow brook emptied itself into the sea close by. The water was as blue as the sea itself. If the view from St. Raphael had charmed them, that looking back towards it seemed still more beautiful. The cathedral and

villas of St. Raphael, which gave the impression of being built on the sea-shore, the historic village of Fréjus on the hill-slope to the left, and behind both the snow-capped hills outlined by a sky almost as blue as the sea, made a most wonderful picture. There were still one or two hydroplanes prolonging their flight before the midday rest.

De Gaurival looked about for a restaurant, thinking it impossible to find a prettier spot, but there was nothing worthy of the name. They re-seated themselves in the car and continued to Beauvallon.

The hotel was built on the hillside, the whole slope down to the sea being laid out in gardens. On either side were pine-woods, and the lovers, after ordering their meal and arranging that it should be served in a little summer-house in the garden, went and rested in a secluded spot under the trees.

As de Gaurival settled himself comfortably against a tree-trunk, he uttered an exclamation and put his hand into his pocket.

"I had forgotten your letters. I went to the Poste Restante to fetch them just before we started. There were none for me, but two for you."

Isabelle put out her hand. "How one hates correspondence when one is happy!—how one needs it when one is miserable!"

De Gaurival was examining the two missives.

"If I were your wife you would open them."

"I should just think I would!"

"I should know what to expect, then, if I were your wife. I should be very unhappy, at any rate at first, but I should not mind."

"No, you would not be happy with me."

"But I would rather be unhappy with you than

happy without you—in fact, I could never be happy again without you."

"Loin des yeux, loin du cœur."

"How can you say that!—you know it is not true in my case! Life would be easy if that proverb were true."

"It is truer than you think."

"If I were married to you, you would never let me be 'loin des yeux.' I don't think you would even let me stay with my family for a week-end, not to mention a month."

"Certainly not."

"Good-bye, then, to liberty and independence!"

"You may well say so."

"For you I would give up my independence, the thing which I value most in the world. Probably at times I should forget and struggle for it. There would be fights, but you would be stronger than I, and I should have to yield."

"You don't think you could always get your own way then?"

"If I did not think you were stronger than I, I should not love you. Occasionally I feel I owe it to myself to fight for things, but I am content to be mastered by the man I love. It must be a great shock to a woman to find her husband physically weaker than herself, and I fancy it must be a greater shock still to find him morally weaker. She can forgive all faults of character as long as she finds she is loved by a *man*. Above all things, he must be virile."

"And I come up to your standard of virility?"

"You know you do, Gauri—I sometimes dread and sometimes long for some event which should bring

about a clash of wills, to see what would happen! I have always been able to get my own way when I really wanted it, and I sometimes cannot believe that it will not always be the same. I am too clever or too artful or something. I sometimes wish I were not so. I deprive myself of something."

"Your cleverness, or whatever you may like to call it, would not stand you in great stead if you were my wife."

"Probably not. But as a rule a woman does not know her husband when she marries him, and you I know so well that I should not strive for things that you did not want me to have. I should only want to make you happy and satisfied with me and all the world."

"Could you make me happy?"

"Supremely happy."

"Never! It would be one long story of furious jealousy on my part about the past, and anxious jealousy about the future."

"No, no, no. I would bring you peace. After a few months—a year—you would have forgotten the past, and you would look forward with happy confidence to the future."

"And at that very moment you would deceive me."

"Gauri, I would never dare to. You would kill me. I know it as certainly as that I must die some day. But Gauri, quite apart from that, I should never deceive you. I love you."

"You don't know how to love, you don't know what love is."

"I am learning. Slowly, I admit. But love that is wakened late as mine is, and offers itself at

my age, is stronger than that which comes at twenty. It cannot but last to the end."

"If I was sure of that!"

"You *are* sure at heart, though you will never acknowledge it."

"But what is all this nonsensical talk? You can never be my wife."

"Probably not, but don't *say* it."

"And yet I sometimes have glimpses of the wife you might have been to me, of the happiness that might have been ours, of the woman I could have made you."

"Who knows? Perhaps my husband will one day no longer need me. Just now it looks as if that was the case."

"We are three."

"Three? But my husband might one day be glad to be free himself!"

"Even so, still there are two of us."

"Just you and me."

"No, I and another. This letter is a proof that I was right when I changed my whole attitude towards you. Do you see the writing?" De Gaurival lowered the outstretched hand in which she held the letter, and brought it into a position for her to read.

"It's a letter from Ford. What do you mean? He could never come between us."

"Always."

"You can read this letter if you like. You see I say so before I have opened it myself."

"And in spite of all that has happened you still keep up your relations with that man?"

"I very rarely see him, and he very rarely writes to me. What are you driving at? I don't understand."

"Really! Let me explain! When we first became intimate in Algiers I told you that you saw Ford too often. The two conditions I had demanded of you were, that you would never flirt and never utter a threat to me."

"I never flirted with Ford. He was a fellow-countryman, the only Englishman I knew in Algiers, and we naturally felt friendly. Englishmen are not the same as Americans, though the French think they are."

"Your behaviour did not please me, fellow-countryman or not. I suffered, and you knew it. Then, when circumstances put a world of happiness within our reach, when your husband decided to leave for France, when my patience was to be rewarded—you suddenly decided to accompany your husband and to travel on the same boat with Ford."

"Ford had nothing to do with my decision. This is the first time you have mentioned his name."

"That you should have deserted me at the precise moment when fate had played into our hands was enough reason to change our whole relationship, but that you should have gone off with Ford was more than I could ever forgive."

"Gone off with Ford? How could I help it if he took the same boat as we did?"

"The whole time in Algiers I took the utmost care that you should not be compromised, I sacrificed precious moments for the sake of your name and your reputation. I controlled my feelings and looks at infinite sacrifice, so that you should not be talked about, and after all that you go and compromise yourself with Ford. Did you think marriage possible between us after that?"

"Oh! How can you say such things? I don't know what you mean."

"Did you really think me capable of that?"

"Oh, let me go! Let me go!" Isabelle pushed away de Gaurival's arm which still held hers, and moved away a few yards, leaning her head against a tree as if stunned. Suddenly she stood upright and spoke in a calm and determined voice. "Why did we come together again if everything is hopeless? What are we doing together here? What are you hoping for, wishing for?"

"I need you."

"You need me as long as I have a husband?—and if I had none, what then?"

"I cannot tell you what would happen."

"But you must think it out. What does all this mean? The motto that you gave me was, 'All or nothing.' Your interpretation is 'all' while I have a husband, and 'nothing' after. You horrify and disgust me."

"You always expected to *marry* me, then? That is what you have been working up to? I am sorry to disappoint you?"

"Don't speak in that tone. It is not the moment. Be frank. I have often thought, 'If I were your wife, this would happen or that would happen,' but I have never thought of how it would come about, nor 'worked up to it,' as you call it. You told me that you would never feel yourself justified in taking me from my husband if he needed me and did not ill-treat me. I acquiesced, whether I liked your magnanimity or not. But probably I took for granted—simply from your saying that—that if I were free I should be yours and yours only. Our intimacy could

not have continued unless I had had that assurance in the back of my mind—yet I do not think I had ever consciously thought it out."

"Well, do not think of it now."

"How can I help it? What you have said changes everything. You *had* thought of it. What you said just now was not said on the spur of the moment."

"You must trust me. I know what I am worth, I shall know my duty."

"Well then, tell me what is going to happen?"

"You ought not to think of that. It is no business of yours."

"It seems to me that I am the chief person concerned. I wish with all my heart I had never thought about it; but now that I have, I will not shrink from the truth—I prefer to face risks and contingencies."

"You do not love me if you are calculating about the future."

"I never calculated. I have gone straight forward from the beginning, and you know it. If only I had calculated, perhaps we should not be in the critical position in which we now find ourselves."

"You do not love me, then?"

"Perhaps not. I have received such a shock that I hardly know how or what I feel. When the time came, for one reason or other, I might not have married you. I might have refused either for your sake or my own. And you must know me well enough to be certain that unless you wanted and desired me heart and soul as your wife, I should never have consented. I have still some self-respect left."

"Well, then?"

"But this is different. If when the time came you suddenly found you did not want to marry me, I

could have forgiven you. My suffering might have been terrible, and yet I could have forgiven you. One cannot force sentiments. But that all this time you have calculated, *you*, that you would not marry me in any case, is unforgivable. You have a right to decide what you like, but the moment you took such a decision, you ought to have left me in peace. At that moment you had no right to continue our intimacy. Don't you understand that ?"

" Nothing can stop that now. It is too late."

" Oh no ! As long as we were going along blindly there was some excuse: but now there is none. We have faced facts, and after what you have said things cannot be the same again. What ! You wanted me just as long as I belonged to another—and no longer ! It is awful to think of !"

" Leave all that to me."

" I who considered I belonged to you already ! Then you have no hold on me whatever ! How could I continue to love somebody who had no right at all over me ?"

De Gaurival got up and planted himself in front of Isabelle.

" Listen to me. You say that for your part you do not know if you would have married me, so I do not understand what all this discussion is about. At any rate, this is certain: that during the whole of our intimacy in Algiers I wanted you with all the strength of my soul for my wife. You were the ideal woman for me. I was at your feet. I took every precaution that you should not be compromised, but I hoped that in spite of all my care something might occur which would give me complete possession of you. Then came the catastrophe. You left me, compromising yourself

not with me, but with Ford. I lost you, and my whole ideal of woman was shattered. For I had idealized you, and put you on a plane above all your sex. You could——"

"But *now?* Talk about your feelings *at the present time.*"

"I wanted you to the exclusion of all else. I still want you to the exclusion of all else; but that can never now be realized, and entirely through your fault. My mind, body, and soul still yearn for you. I love you as much now, perhaps more, than in those days. It is impossible, however, that you have not noticed my change of behaviour towards you. Are you so blind that you find me the same as in Algiers?"

"No, I knew that you took long to forgive what you might consider a slight; but I thought that I was redeeming the past, and that soon that unhappy incident would be forgotten."

"Never!"

"How could I imagine that Ford was mixed up with it in your mind? Well, we must part."

"It is too late."

"It is not too late. You must leave me. I cannot be the same to you again. I would give anything that my eyes had remained shut; but now they are opened, I am not going to shut them and pretend I have not seen. If *you* can do that, I can't."

"You are certainly not English for nothing. What a race! You would argue about everything. This idyll of ours—for it might still be one—you destroy by turning it into prosaic black and white with your analyzing and discussing. This day which was to have been as long and as happy as any we have ever spent together, you are changing into a nightmare."

"You, not I."

"Leave the future alone; it is my business, not yours. I shall know how to act when the time comes."

"Tell me what will happen."

He replied still more masterfully: "Not now. You are agitated and distraught. We will take up this discussion again if you desire it, but when you are calmer. You are now to do as I tell you. You are to think of nothing but enjoying this day as we had planned it. Let past and future be forgotten."

"How can I? You ask what is impossible."

"I am going to the pavilion to see if luncheon is ready. Will you promise me to eat properly and not to mention any subject which causes uneasiness—to live in the present?"

"How can I? It is cruel to ask such a thing."

"Isabelle, I insist. You must trust me."

Isabelle looked at de Gaurival as if trying to read him through and through; then all her indignation seemed to disappear, and she answered quietly and sadly: "It is true I must trust you. I have nothing left on earth but that. Gauri, I will try to do as you wish me."

"Thank you. Look at this lovely day. Look at this moss, these trees overhead. Think of how isolated we are from the rest of the world. We might be alone in the universe."

"You know that I appreciate these things even more than you do. I had looked forward to this week as if it had been the ambition of a lifetime, and it is going to turn out the most miserable."

"Wait and see."

"I can pretend to be happy, but I shall never really be happy again. Something has snapped inside me."

"You make me regret that I ever brought you here!" And he stood up.

"Oh, Gauri, don't say that! Oh, Gauri, you will break my heart! Let us be happy, then. Let us try to forget everything, even if it's only for this one day."

De Gaurival flung himself full-length down beside her. "My darling, my darling! I love you! Do you hear? I love you! I love you more than any woman I have ever met or known. Feel it. Fill yourself with it. And my love is no small or petty sentiment. Do you not know I am capable of greater love than other men—that I stand apart from them, above them? My love is strong, and when I give it, nothing can come between me and my desire, nothing else occupies my thoughts. I am wholly and absolutely absorbed. You, who do not know what love is, cannot appreciate all that is bestowed on you—thrown at your feet. One day, perhaps, years hence, you will understand better and wonder and regret your ignorance. What is yours has not been given to many women. Oh, Isabelle, Isabelle, how I love you!"

"Gauri—if——"

"Don't speak. I tell you not to speak."

"But how can——"

"I do not want your voice, your thoughts—I only want you yourself."

"Then you might as well have an Egyptian mummy."

"Talk, then, but don't *argue*. Will you be kind to me this one day? Will you think only of ourselves?"

"I will try."

"That is right. I like you to show pluck. Listen, then. We will go and have lunch and then come back here. Nobody passes here, and we cannot find a better place for your siesta. And now sit up and make yourself tidy." De Gaurival took a few steps, but turned round suddenly and came back. "Isabelle,

I love you. You have aroused a storm in me that now only you can calm. Be careful. You do not want me to kill you." He shook her shoulder, then suddenly dropping on his knees changed his tone. "What did I say? I frightened you? You know that I would not harm a hair of your head. Only be kind to me."

"No, you did not frighten me—I could not be frightened, I think, of anything you could do to me. It is your thoughts which frighten me."

"My thoughts are that I love you. Nothing else exists for me. Take graciously what I give you, for you will receive from no other man on earth what I am capable of heaping on you."

"I will."

"My darling!" De Gaurival kissed her fiercely and rapidly and jumped up.

The meal passed off as de Gaurival wished. He employed all the art of which he was capable to amuse and interest Isabelle, who little by little was carried away by his conversation, and for the time being forgot the pain at her heart. De Gaurival had ordered a tempting meal and the wines she liked best. The summer-house was covered with climbing flowering plants, trailing branches of which entered doors and windows. Roses still bloomed around them. The December sun was warm without being too glaring. They were alone, for the waiter had some hundred yards to walk along the garden path to fetch his dishes.

All seemed perfect. Isabelle wanted to forget, she was as determined to put off thinking of what de Gaurival had said as he was to make her forget.

Neither that day nor during the last days at Nice was the conversation renewed.

On January 2 they returned to Paris.

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE WAR ZONE AGAIN

ISABELLE, left alone in Paris, waited to hear from de Gaurival before making any plans. She decided not to return to England till she knew it was impossible to follow him.

Three days after his departure, letters from him began to arrive.

"5, 1, 1916.

"I had a good journey, and was allowed to travel second class. I arrived here this morning, Wednesday, after having passed two good nights in hotels. I sent you a card this morning, and if it reaches you you will know where I am. I did not find my section T.M. 300 at the place I first went to, so slept the night there, and after exhaustive inquiries heard it was in the very town from which I started for my leave on December 24. They moved a week ago, and are now resting here, or rather in the neighbourhood. We are forbidden to leave our lorries, and cannot go into town without permission.

"Shall we remain here some time? They say yes, but I do not know. I am assigned to No. 10 lorry. I have already had two meals in it and am going to sleep in it to-night. I have put on my *bleu*, my hands are already dirty, and I am quite the workman once more. You see how far away I am already from the

Grand Hotel; but I did not suffer too much. Happily it is fine and not too cold.

"So you see, though I am close to a town, I might for all practical purposes be at the front. I do not leave my lorry, and must get used to living in it—and what's more, alone. So do not think of me. Wait for me in Paris, and have a good time till I can come and see you again, in three months—in the spring.

"I am writing on a box and sitting on the floor of my lorry. I am consequently very uncomfortable. Be thankful *you*, just to be 'comfortable.'

"Thank you very much for the good time we had together. Do not be vexed that I was not the whole time with you. It was unavoidable. Indeed, I have to make excuses to my family also for not having been to see them more often, and for having forbidden them to come to the station to say good-bye. Still a little bewildered by this sudden change in my situation, I take leave of you for to-day. . . .

"I found here several letters from you among the dozen which had come for me in my absence—also some newspapers."

"VITRY-LE-FRANÇOIS,
"5, 1, 1916.

"I have arrived here safely and expect to remain some time."

"7, 1, 1916.

"Enclosed is a letter from Commandant Adour, addressed to me, but which concerns you more than myself. He doubtless thinks that a woman who is so talented an artist is *a priori* good and beautiful. Please return me the letter.

"I am pleased to tell you that I agree with the Commandant, and think that your picture is good.

It has atmosphere. You will see how pleased my former chief is with it by his letter.

"I am well, and am rapidly getting used to mud and dirt and to my lorry, in which I eat and sleep. Some good woman close by boiled me two eggs this morning. I would have been glad to pay five francs for them, for the beef and lentils of our everyday fare do not tempt me much.

"Our sheepskins were issued to us yesterday, which will be very useful at night. I hope to be able to sleep in a bed to-night or to-morrow. I have found a little room in a labourer's cottage close by. There are clean sheets and the room is not draughty. What can one want more?

"I do not know if we shall remain long on the outskirts of this town. No one knows. I shall probably get leave to go into town this evening from five to eight. It will be grand to find oneself in busy streets again and dining at a restaurant. In this morning's *Matin* I read an article by Olande, a deputy whom I know well. I was so preoccupied with you when I passed through Paris that I forgot to go and see him. It is a pity, as he might have been very useful to me. All the same, I forgive you!

"Adios. Work hard and keep well."

"13, 1, 1916.

"I return the photos which you sent me, and tear up the letter which accompanied them.

"I am glad to hear that you are so much better and that you have started work again. Your letter of the 8th, posted on the 10th, only reached me this morning.

"Our lorries are still here in the same place, lying idle.

"The whole group is resting, and we stay in bed till

eight o'clock every morning. I sleep most of the time. It is said we shall be here another six weeks. So you have time to come this way if such is your desire.

"You ask for certain information, but you will find it quite as well in the 'Bottin des Départements,' if you really want details.

"The sun is at last deigning to smile. Since my arrival here I have been living in the mud or in my lorry the whole day, never taking off my *sabots* except to go into the town.

"Just now a man came up to me, calling out, 'Bonjour, Gauri.' It was Tolland, who is also stationed outside the town and, like me, in the Motor Transport Service. I will not say a word about your foolish letter of yesterday, nor about your fears as to your friend's discretion. I should say too much if I wrote at all. But oh, what a fine subject for argument!—British ways and customs, if one may judge them by you and what you say of them!

"If you leave Paris for these parts, try to let me know."

On receiving this letter, Isabelle wrote fixing a day of the following week on which she would leave Paris. She begged her lover to give her some sort of address where she might either find him, or have news of him in case he was prevented from meeting her at the station. She was under the impression, from his letters, that he was in some village near Vitry-le-François, and she wished for fuller information. But no further letter arrived, and on the day she had fixed she started off. Setting out in this way, with no certainty as to her destination, worried her considerably, and she started without enthusiasm and with none of the hopes and joy of a near meeting.

Doubt and anxiety of where she should sleep that night so preoccupied her, that it even precluded thought of the man she was going to see.

It was only a three hours' journey from Paris to Vitry-le-François, and her "sauf-conduit" had been signed without a word by the Commissaire de Police. Yet when she had mentioned the word "Vitry" to friends, they had been very doubtful of a woman getting there who could not prove business or urgent necessity. It is annoying to make all arrangements, and then at the end of a long journey to find oneself obliged to remain at the station and be sent back by the next train! This ignominious return had happened to several of Isabelle's friends who had tried to visit their husbands; but once she had made up her mind and had written to Gauri, she was determined to make the attempt.

The train was full of officers, mostly on their way to Nancy and Châlons; but there were women crowded into second-class carriages in the front of the train, and Isabelle joined them. She thought of her journey to Nancy on this same line some six months earlier. Would Gauri be at the station this time?

She arrived at Vitry at three, and as she neared the station exit she noticed two important-looking officials on duty there. The critical moment had arrived. As she came up to one of them, she heard him say to a young woman as he looked at her papers: "No, no, petite dame, you must tell me the *truth*. That is not what you have come for. I must know the real truth." He was too conscientious in his duty, Isabelle thought, for her business, and she made a movement to reach the other official, but too late. The conscientious one had already held out his hand

for her *laissez-passer*, and scrutinized her face. "I've seen you once before?" With great presence of mind, Isabelle said, "Mais oui, Monsieur," and he turned away from her to continue his questioning of the "petite dame." Isabelle was free! She gave up her ticket and was out of the station in a second.

She looked round. No Gauri! No Gauri! No Gauri! Oh, it was too atrocious! Where was he? There was a small hotel just opposite the station. Should she go there? She did so, but stood in the passage some five minutes before she could attract anybody's attention. Soldiers coming in and out stared at her, and at last she asked one of them where she could find the *patron*. He led her into the kitchen.

She addressed herself to an elderly woman: "Have you a Monsieur de Gaurival staying here?"

"Non, Madame."

The woman seemed kindly disposed, and Isabelle told her her trouble.

"I have come to see Monsieur de Gaurival, who is a transport driver in T.M. 300. Do you know where they are stationed?"

"No, but I will try to find out for you. Transport drivers are often in and out. Give me a letter for your friend, and I will let him have it."

Isabelle thanked her profusely and scribbled a note. She was almost tempted to take rooms at this Hôtel de la Gare, because of the woman's kindness, but it was really very dirty and uncomfortable. Besides, she must ascertain first if Gauri was waiting for her in some other hotel. Promising, therefore, to return later for an answer, she continued her way towards the town.

A small ragged boy offered to carry her bag for her,

and she accepted his offer. This was fortunate, for she found it was some quarter of an hour's walk to the centre of the town. The small boy told her that the Cloche was the principal hotel, and the one " où tous les voyageurs descendent." To be less conspicuous, Isabelle made the small boy walk on the opposite pavement. It was just as well not to parade her recent arrival and thus attract attention. Never had she seen such a muddy, dreary town. The roads and pavements were inches deep in mud, the houses and the people themselves were bespattered by it.

She arrived at the Cloche, which was in the main street, went in and asked for de Gaurival. The name was not on their books. Isabelle tried to look undisturbed, and said she required a room.

" All are engaged at present."

" You can't give me any room at all ?"

" Perhaps we shall have some vacant after six, when the Paris train has gone."

" Can you promise me one for six o'clock ?"

" Non, madame."

" Can you tell me where I can find a room ?"

" Perhaps at the Grand Hotel, a few doors farther down."

Isabelle asked to be allowed to leave her bag there, and went to explore.

She passed twice in front of some big *portes-cochères* without recognizing it as the entrance of the Grand Hotel. It was a tenth-rate inn ! The bedrooms were over stables, cold and dreadful, with long, narrow dark passages which frightened her even with a guide. When she saw what they called the dining-room, she asked if they could give her a meal in her bedroom, but they replied it was impossible.

The smell of the courtyard penetrated all the rooms. There were soldiers loitering about, and the women cooking and cleaning were dirty and untidy. Isabelle thought she would rather stay in the street all night than sleep there, and in despair she returned to the Cloche.

She had to wait ten minutes to see the *patronne*, and her anxiety weighed so heavily on her that the time seemed interminable. She must sleep somewhere, and here was she, who was so anxious to avoid publicity and who would have been content with the most modest accommodation, obliged to go about expostulating with one hotel-keeper after another. If refused here, must she return to the Hôtel de la Gare? It was getting dark, and it meant a long walk in the dirty streets again; besides, it was the same type of hotel as the one she had just turned her back on, and pretty certainly full up.

The *patronne* appeared at last, and her tone became more conciliatory when Isabelle pointed out that it was impossible for her to sleep at the Grand Hotel, and that she preferred a chair at the Cloche to a bed anywhere else in Vitry.

The *patronne* rang a bell and questioned a maid, then nodded to Isabelle to follow her upstairs. What a merciful relief! Isabelle was so full of thankfulness that she did not notice during the first few minutes that there was no window to the room she was so graciously allowed to inhabit. But, finding the atmosphere intolerably stuffy, she opened what she thought was the window, to discover that it looked on to a passage! The air of the passage was little better than that of the room, and in any case it was impossible to have the window open, for anyone

passing by could see in. She closed it again, determined to endure anything uncomplainingly now that she had found a shelter, lighted her candle, and unpacked her bag.

But after a little, the bad air made her feel so sick and faint that she thought that, if she was to remain there all night, it was better to be out of it while she could. Taking her writing materials, she therefore established herself at a little bamboo table in the lounge, near the *patronne's* desk. So lonely, lost, and bewildered did she feel that even to be near the girl writing on her high stool seemed a protection. She made inquiries of this girl as to the villages round Vitry, and whether she could telephone to them. The girl, astonished at the questions, said that no telephone had worked there since the war began. Isabelle could gather no information about motor depots, nor in which village de Gaurival was likely to be. She came to the conclusion she could do nothing but wait, and to ease her mind of its anxiety she turned to her correspondence. By degrees she became so engrossed in her writing that the constant traffic in and out of the hotel failed to attract her least attention, and she was already in the middle of a third letter when a new arrival, entering by the swing-doors, came straight up to her and said: "Bonjour, Madame." Isabelle looked up, but so full was her brain of what she was writing, so absorbed were her thoughts, that for a minute she could not realize that she was not in her own room in Paris, nor indeed where she was. For a few seconds she was dumb, not greeting the man who stood looking down on her.

"What are you doing here?"

Isabelle sprang to her feet at last.

"Gauri, I've come for you! Why weren't you at the station to meet me?"

"When did you arrive at Vitry?"

"At three."

"To-day?"

"Yes. Didn't you get my letters?"

"I've had nothing for a week."

"I've written to you every day. I've had a most awful time since my arrival! You gave me no address, and I did not know where to go!"

"Why didn't you ask for me at my depot?"

"Where is your depot?"

"At the lower end of the town."

"Here, in Vitry?"

"Yes, I told you so."

"I never imagined it was in Vitry itself. You always said in the neighbourhood or 'on the outskirts.' I thought you were in some village."

"You don't half read my letters!"

"You don't read mine!—or you would have seen I did not understand."

"Well, we can't stand talking here. Get on your things and come out. Everybody's staring at us."

It was true. The few people who were reading or writing or hanging about in the lounge had noticed the meeting and scented a romance. There are many of these romances at the back of the army, but they never fail to excite interest, and are looked on for the most part with indulgence and sympathy.

In the street, Isabelle related all her anxieties since her arrival, and described the room she had to sleep in that night.

"Well, I've taken a flat. Would you like to go there now instead?"

"Can we dine there? What I want most of all this minute is dinner. I lunched early, had no tea, and am starving."

"Haven't you had dinner? I've had mine."

"Well, you must have another. I can't wait. Why did you dine so early?"

"Five is the soldier's hour."

"Can we have dinner at the flat?"

"No, I haven't found anybody to cook for us yet."

"Well, let's go back to the hotel and dine there."

De Gaurival was loath to show himself in a public restaurant, as he had no signed permission to come into the town, but he could not leave Isabelle the very instant he had found her. So they hurried over their meal and went out again. There was a splendid moon, which transformed the Vitry streets as with a magic wand, hiding their dirt and sordidness under a cloak of silver.

They walked on, Isabelle not asking nor caring what way they took, only too happy to go anywhere, do anything, as long as she had the comfort of her companion's presence.

They came to a road which was lined for some hundred yards with huge motor-lorries. They looked like great monsters in the moonlight, and though lights glimmered from some of them through the slits in the canvas covers, they did not see a soul or hear a voice.

De Gaurival, without giving any clue as to where he was leading her, strode forward, till at the third car he suddenly stopped, climbed up some steps, and disappeared underneath the canvas. A second later his head reappeared, and he said in his bluntest way:

"Come up here; don't speak."

Isabelle mounted the little ladder, and clambered

over the side of the car. De Gaurival, who was holding aside the heavy waterproof canvas for her, let it slide back again, and they were in complete darkness.

"Keep still and don't raise your voice."

He struck a match and lighted a gas-jet. Isabelle looked round her. They were in what looked like a small, low room. There was a sort of canvas hammock slung up at one end. A small table was covered with plates, tin cups, and bottles. There was a big half loaf of bread balanced on two nails above the table.

"This is where I had my meal with four other men this evening. What do you think of my present lodging?"

Isabelle was delighted with it. She was filled with wonder at its contrivances and comforts: it was lighted and warmed by gas, it was watertight, it was sufficiently though simply furnished, containing a bed, table, chairs, etc. She would love to live in such a "caravan," as she called it.

Gauri laughed in spite of himself. "Yes! Yes! You would like to use one of these cups for your soup, then pour your wine into it, and finally hand it out for coffee? You would like to use the same knife and fork for everything, and sit with cramped knees with your plate on a case."

"Of course, if you insist on messing five or six together, it must be a bit of a squash; but with a little ingenuity and handiness the place could be made quite comfortable for two."

"And you think two men could sleep in that bed, perhaps?"

"No, another would have to be slung every evening. But you don't sleep here."

"No, I have enough of the lorry in the day."

"Hullo, Gaurival! Are you there?"

A deep bass voice came from outside. De Gaurival pushed Isabelle further into the corner, turned down the gas, and leant out of the car. She could not hear what they were saying, but a minute later de Gaurival turned to her.

"My pal is back and was just about to come in. I've sent him on a message, but he'll return in a minute. Quick, we must be off."

They scrambled over the side, and there was not a soul to be seen as they walked quickly and silently away.

Instead of turning to the right towards the town they went straight on.

De Gaurival stopped at a small gate. "This is where I am lodging. Do you want to see my quarters?"

They walked across a garden, and de Gaurival opened the door with a latch-key. It was a small, low room, crammed with odds and ends, more like an attic than a bedroom.

"Would you like to sleep here to-night? You have such a bad bedroom at the hotel."

"Can I? Is it safe?"

"You would not be very comfortable, but the bed is all right. Feel it."

"I see it is."

"And so you've come back to me again; you've come? It's true, then!"

"Yes, Gauri." He clasped her in his arms.

A few minutes later de Gaurival and Isabelle were out on the road again. Being yet only nine o'clock, de Gaurival wished to ascertain if Madame Plon had

gone to bed, and, if not, whether it might be possible to go into their flat that night. Some hundred yards down the road, Gauri stopped at a big iron gateway between high walls. Looking through the bars, across a garden, they could see the house on the right. It was in complete darkness. De Gaurival refrained from ringing; he pulled Isabelle to him and pointed out the building. "Madame Plon only uses the first floor; the three downstairs rooms are ours—that's the window of the bedroom, that of the sitting-room, and that of the kitchen. You see these high walls—we cannot possibly be overlooked either in our rooms or in the garden." With an effort he controlled the feeling in his voice, and continued without emotion: "I can't disturb Madame Plon so late, but I will go there early to-morrow and get things prepared, and find a woman to cook for us. When will you come, in the morning or afternoon?"

"In time for lunch, if they will be ready to give it us here."

"Yes, I'll see to that. You notice where the house is, and you will be able to find it to-morrow."

He explained to her the way they had come.

As they returned by de Gaurival's lodgings, he again said:

"You won't stay here?"

"I think it's better to return to the hotel. They are expecting me."

"Very well."

On reaching the hotel the door was already locked, but on ringing it was opened, and Isabelle, saying good-night to Gauri, walked in. A man and a woman, whom she had not noticed in the shadow of the wall, tried to follow her in when the door opened, but the

patronne barred their passage. "You can't come in; we've no rooms left. I've already told you so." The man expostulated and threatened, but it was of no avail, and the door was shut again.

Isabelle felt full of sympathy for this poor couple who had not been able to find a roof at ten o'clock at night. She remembered her own anxiety of a few hours earlier. She found that she herself had been promoted to a better room, and her things had been moved into it. It had a window to the open air—what a luxury that seemed—and she was soon in bed and slept well. In the morning, as she lay awake in bed, she tried to reconstruct to herself all the events of yesterday. What a day of anxieties, surprises, and hopes realized! It was all too wonderful! She lay thinking, thinking, till it suddenly occurred to her it was already ten o'clock, and that she had promised to be at the flat at eleven.

She jumped out of bed. She thought it hardly possible that de Gaurival would have been able to arrange everything so quickly at the flat that they could really lunch there. He probably did not realize all that was needed even for a small flat. But whatever happened, she must be there by eleven.

She found her way quite easily, though the mud, which covered everything, destroyed all the poetry with which she had clothed these same streets the evening before.

Isabelle found the iron gate open, and she went in without ringing. De Gaurival was standing leaning against the open doorway in the sun and reading the paper. He looked as if he had lived there all his life.

He raised his eyes when he heard footsteps on the gravel.

"Oh, Gauri! It's too wonderful!"

He showed her their rooms, which were light, airy, clean, and nicely furnished. Unlike the rooms at Nancy and Ramadet, the cupboards and drawers were entirely clear of clothes or linen belonging to the people of the house.

Isabelle could hardly believe their present good luck. She had left Paris thinking to find de Gaurival in some village where, if she could live there at all, it would only be in the midst of crowds of soldiers, or, if in Vitry itself, where she would only be able to see him an hour or so a day. But here they were, not only in a town, but in a very comfortable flat! De Gaurival was only a short distance from his lorry, and yet far enough to render their movements quite free from curious eyes. The house was just outside the town, between the Marne and the Canal. There was no need ever to walk down the street leading to it, for at the end of the orchard behind the house was a gate which led on to the canal bank, and from there they could go into the town without even crossing the street in which their house lay.

De Gaurival had already received from Madame Plon a key to this gate.

While de Gaurival was explaining all this to her, Isabelle realized that he must have taken this flat as soon as he had arrived at Vitry—that he had thought out all these details one by one while waiting impatiently for her to join him. Yet he had never mentioned a word of it to her. All he had written was: "If you come this way." She shuddered to think of all they might have missed, for she had pictured him in such totally different surroundings that it was lucky that she had come at all.

Before beginning lunch, de Gaurival introduced Isabelle to Madame Plon, who seemed a nice woman, quiet and reserved.

The lunch was a great success. Madame Henri, whom de Gaurival had engaged to cook for them, was very efficient, and Isabelle marvelled how all went so smoothly at such short notice.

As soon as de Gaurival had to go back to his lorry, Isabelle also returned to the town. She went to the hotel, paid her bill, collected her belongings, and, to put them off the scent, drove off as if for the station. But half-way there she directed the coachman to their flat at the opposite end of the town. She unpacked quickly, and when Gauri returned about five everything was in order, the lamps were lit, the rooms warm and cosy, and Isabelle looked, as if she might have lived there all her life.

CHAPTER X

LIFE IN VITRY-LE-FRANÇOIS

ISABELLE grew more and more fond of their little flat as the days went by. The rooms were light, airy, and clean, and above all were far removed from curious eyes. Nobody overlooked them, and she could come and go freely without restraint. She rarely went out in the morning, but she found exercise and pleasure in a totally new occupation to her. Gauri had bought some faggots and logs the day they settled in, but they were all over six feet long and had to be sawn or chopped for use. He had borrowed a saw and hatchet from Madame Plon, and showed Isabelle how to use them. She was quick to learn, and each day when Gauri returned for lunch he would find her hard at work, with a pile of logs and sticks ready for him to carry into the house.

They often lunched with windows wide open for, though January, the sun was so bright that in the middle of the day it was quite warm. Madame Henri hurried off as soon as she had finished waiting on them, for she had her own husband's dinner to prepare. Isabelle made the coffee herself. They were glad of this arrangement, for they liked to feel themselves alone in the flat. When coffee, cognac, and cigar had been disposed of, de Gaurival would sometimes sing to the guitar, for they had found one hanging on the wall of their bedroom.

About two o'clock, when he returned to his lorry, Isabelle went out shopping or for a walk. De Gaurival longed to accompany her, for he had nothing to do in the afternoon. His main business during the "rest" was to keep his lorry in working order; if any serious repairs were needed, the cars were sent to a *parc*, where there were proper workshops and professional mechanics. Unluckily it was the duty of chauffeurs, however much time they had on their hands, to remain near their detachments, and he therefore did not dare to absent himself too often.

Isabelle usually took her walks along the canal behind the house. At first she thought the straight paths lined with trees monotonous and ugly, but as time went on their charm grew on her. She liked watching the barges moving slowly along. Occasionally they would be towed by a good pair of horses, but more often it was an old horse or donkey, or sometimes young girls or women that did the work. Every barge had its small dog, which barked furiously at all passers-by. The family life on board interested her; the clothes spread out to dry, a woman without a hat emptying a pail of dirty water over the side, or a girl half up the hatch-way talking across the boat to the boy at the rudder—for barges, like everything else in civil life in France, were managed by women, and youths under eighteen.

She sometimes watched a barge manœuvring a lock. It was a matter of daily wonder how so large a barge could go through so small a lock, but, with deft handling, in it went, only touching lightly the stone walls on each side. It delighted her to see the water rushing like a veritable cascade into this deep reservoir, and then to see the barge slowly rise

till at last the water-level on the farther side of the lock was reached, and the gates for its exit could be opened. Once more the horses were set in motion, and the barge moved smoothly on.

All the canals were well above the level of the Marne, though sometimes they were only separated from it by a narrow strip of ground.

Soldiers from the barracks and convalescent hospitals also found pleasure in these canal-banks, and Isabelle was continually meeting them as they sauntered along by twos and threes.

One day she left the canal-bank to explore in a new direction. Suddenly by the roadside she came upon a grave. It was surrounded by a neat little rail made of osiers. There were flowers planted on the grave, and others had been freshly laid there. The flag tied to the cross was grey, its colours washed out by the rain of a year. And the name? She turned over the little label of white-painted wood hanging by a wire near the flag. The regiment, the company, the number of the grave was given, but no name and no date. It was the first time she had seen a soldier's grave—a man buried where he had fallen—and it filled her with pity. Had he been shot down unawares by an enemy bullet, or had he grappled with the foe and died fighting?

She continued her walk. Here was another grave, this time on a slope near the road, and steps led up to it with a rail on each side like that around the grave. The same regiment was indicated on the little label, but again no name. At the foot of the flag was a broken rifle and an empty grey haversack. They seemed to her the most pathetic and sacred objects she had ever seen. A few yards farther on were other

graves. They had all been tended in the same careful way; the flowers must have been planted by gentle women from the town, and the osiers woven by clever hands.

Two graves were under water; the winter inundations had swamped them. Only the tops of the crosses were visible. How had all these men been killed in this out-of-the-way spot? Were they perhaps a patrol guarding the town, and might the enemy have suddenly appeared on the hill above and outnumbered and killed them? The steep hillside to the right was covered with shrubs, and she pictured the enemy stealing through the bushes and taking the little outpost by surprise. She had a longing to do something for the men who had died thus for others. But they were dead and all was over! These few nameless graves by the roadside brought home to her the wickedness and cruelty of war as nothing else had, even more than the long daily death-roll covering columns of a newspaper.

Another image of war was presented to her gaze one day when de Gaurival, contrary to regulations, absented himself from his lorry for a few hours and took her to Fresnicourt and Huiron. They were villages which had suffered more than any others in this neighbourhood from bombardment. Vitry itself had scarcely been damaged at all from the occupation of the Germans. Only one house had been burnt down, though several shops had been ransacked.

It was a long walk. They kept to one of the canal paths for several kilometres. Then, at a bridge where the road cut the canal at right angles, they stopped to inquire their way. At this point stood a house, a corner of which had been shot away; half the roof

also had fallen in. A woman was busy with her household duties and her two children were playing on the doorstep. She had returned to her half-ruined home—perhaps she had never even left it—and she was evidently making the best of things, though at present there was little prospect of even getting the roof mended.

She told them in answer to their inquiries that they were only a few minutes' walk from Fresnicourt. Just before entering the village, they saw a signboard on which was painted the mournful word "Tombeaux," together with a hand pointing across the fields; but there was no path, and it was so muddy and wet that they did not venture to leave the road.

In Fresnicourt itself many houses were entirely in ruins, others were half broken down, while curiously enough the highest building—the Mairie—with its clock-tower was untouched. From among the piles of bricks and stones heaped up in what were once neat little flower or vegetable gardens, pieces of wood and iron were here and there to be distinguished. They were the remains of bedsteads and other pieces of furniture, all that was left of the household treasures.

Three kilometres farther on, just outside Huiron, they saw two of the military police on bicycles. At a level-crossing the men dismounted and, leaning their machines against the gate, began talking to the gate-keeper. Here was a dilemma! De Gaurival and Isabelle could not avoid the level-crossing, and must therefore pass quite close to these dreaded officials, who had evidently already seen them and were watching their approach. Would they be stopped? Would de Gaurival be questioned and punished for being so far away from his detachment? Isabelle whispered

that there were other motor detachments at Fresnicourt, and they would possibly think he belonged to these. She tried to look unconcerned and converse naturally with him, but de Gaurival was even more anxious than she. Fortunately, their fears were groundless. They were asked no questions, and in a few minutes were beyond the danger zone.

Here was Huiron—not the Huiron of eighteen months before, but a new Huiron which was trying to come to life again. Not one of the former houses had escaped destruction. Some had a piece of a wall left standing here or there, a few had part of their roofs intact, but most were level with the ground.

Alongside these ruins were little wooden huts with red-tiled roofs. These very bright-coloured patches gave the idea from a distance of a village of brand new houses. But seen close, they were found to be little more than wooden shanties raised a foot above the ground and with a good water-tight roof. These little huts were the work of the Society of Friends. They had been friends indeed to the residents of the village. Their work had enabled the villagers to come back, and had given them courage to pick up again the threads of their former life.

De Gaurival spoke to a woman who was leading a horse down the village street. She told them many pathetic little stories. Nobody had been killed by the bombardment itself. They had been warned by the French authorities and had fled, burying what valuables they could and taking what they could with them. But in their haste they were obliged to leave behind all their animals, cows, pigs, and poultry. Three old men only had stayed in the village. They had escaped injury from the bombardment and had

not been molested, but they died soon after the return of their families just when peace and order were partially re-established. How pathetic was this story of the three old men! And in this Marne district how many have shared the same fate? To escape being killed by shell-fire only to die of shock or terror. Isabelle asked the woman how she liked the new huts, and what she knew concerning the society which had put them up. Her answers gave the impression that she did not care very much for her new home (for, new and clean as it was, it did not make up to her for her old one with all its nooks and corners), and that she knew little of the Society which had built it. She said that they had had to pay nothing up to the present time, but they might be charged a small rent later on. The village had first been bombarded by the Germans, later by the French. What the enemy had left standing, the French had been forced to destroy.

During this conversation the horse which the young woman was leading became restive, and it was obvious at once that she was quite unused to its management, and that she was even a little nervous with it. Poor woman! But a few months ago she had had her husband and a man to do the rough work. Now she must do it alone. And so it was with all. When they had fled before the Germans they had had no men to guide and help them, no husband or father to take responsibility and share the burden, and now when life must begin again, they must still rely upon themselves.

De Gaurival and Isabelle were much moved by the woman's stories, but it was getting late. They therefore said good-bye to her, took a last glance at the ruins around them, and started for home. They were under the impression that from Huiron they could

return by a shorter road than that by which they had come, and were a little dismayed to hear that at Blacey the road was so extremely muddy and heavy that they would do better to return by Fresnicourt. That meant another eight kilometres and no time for a ten minutes' rest, nor even a chance to take some slight refreshment. They must quicken their pace, moreover, for the military police would be very particular after dusk.

They hastened forward. On a hill some distance from the road, they saw a number of what looked like crosses, standing out black against the sky, and asked a passer-by if they were French graves. "Yes! Both French and German. The Germans established a post there during the Battle of the Marne, but the French stormed the hill, and on the top had a hand-to-hand fight with the enemy. There are about thirty graves up there." "No, there is no path, but you can walk across the fields, and the brook at the bottom of the hill is not too wide to jump." They would much have liked to visit this site where an actual bayonet charge took place, and also to have seen the view from the top, for it was high enough to command all the country round, but they had not time. The fields were too swampy; even here on the road their feet stuck in the mud, making progress very slow.

They had walked twenty kilometres by the time they arrived in the streets of Vitry. Just as they entered the town, they met the same two military policemen on their bicycles whom this time, however, they avoided without difficulty. They also met a regiment of the seventeen class, who were singing as they marched along and seemed bubbling over with life, a contrast to the groups of soldiers

wandering about the streets of Vitry, looking as usual very weary and dismal.

On reaching the town Gauri and Isabelle separated, to meet again at their early dinner. Unfortunately for Isabelle, it was not often that de Gaurival could risk taking a whole day off in this manner. All the more were such excursions treasured by both of them.

They usually dined about five-thirty. They had fixed this early hour both for Madame Henri's convenience and for their own pleasure, for no evening could be too long for them. Madame Henri having cleared away and left the house by seven, they locked up for the night, and realized with extreme satisfaction that they were alone till morning. They would then take the two lamps and carry them into the bedroom. They would poke up the fire, settle into comfortable arm-chairs, and be entirely cosy. It was the best part of their day, and what they always looked forward to.

De Gaurival had of course confided his whereabouts to a friend, in case of a sudden call, but he had no fear of being disturbed at night. Everyone was of opinion that they would be resting there another month at least.

In the mornings, it was Isabelle who prepared the *petit déjeuner*, for de Gaurival had to go off at seven. She would light the bedroom fire, then run into the kitchen, make the coffee and return with all ready on a tray. She loved to show him that she could be as deft and handy as a Frenchwoman, and he was quick to appreciate her skill and attention.

Later she sometimes helped Madame Plon with her fowls and rabbits, so that she might be through with her work in good time and come into town with her.

Madame Plon had given up her servants since the war, but she had taken in a refugee from one of the

devastated villages of the north, who worked for her as much as she could. This woman, like many another, had arrived in Vitry with small children, and for all worldly possessions a bundle of clothes. Madame Plon had taken pity on her, given her shelter and employment, and treated her and the children with the utmost kindness. Always busy, Madame Plon was rather unwilling to exchange, even for an hour or two, her neat homestead with its gay, sheltered garden for the muddy, dreary, and forlorn streets of Vitry. But she did so occasionally for Isabelle's sake. The mud was often so deep that they might almost as well have been walking in a ploughed field, and every passing car splashed them from head to foot. As the pavements were narrow, the houses got their share too, and it was no unusual sight in Vitry to see a woman wash, not only her windows, but the front of her house and bit of pavement every evening at five o'clock.

One day they visited the Mairie, the Public Gardens, and the barracks. Another, they went to see an ancient and historic gateway forming part of the old fortified wall, and from there Madame Plon took Isabelle on to the principal bridge over the Marne, where she pointed out the union of river and canal, for at Vitry as in Châlons and Nancy, canals are the chief highways. This bridge was not used by the German troops when they entered and evacuated the town; they built a wooden one some five hundred yards to the right, and only used their own. They were probably afraid that the French had the exact range, and would shell the permanent one as they crossed it, or that they might be cut off.

But what interested Isabelle most in Vitry was the life of the troops and things unconnected with the

town itself. One previously unoccupied space was devoted to numbers of military carts and long lines of horses. The poor beasts were covered with mud. Here and there soldiers were brushing them, while others were bringing them by couples from the river where they had been watering and cleansing them, but not one remained clean for more than a few minutes.

Then there were the hospitals, consisting of wooden huts surrounded by a paling. Though rather rough in appearance, they were very practical and well equipped. It was here that the severely wounded were transported.

One day Isabelle determined to get a closer view of the motor-lorries than had hitherto been possible. There were two detachments of them on two different roads. They were lined up one behind the other for a long distance by the side of the roads. As she and Madame Plon passed by, the men were cleaning them, painting them, taking them to pieces or putting them together again. They looked up and stared after the women, but made no remarks as they might have done if a woman had been alone. Isabelle wanted to see Gauri, but was a little afraid of his seeing her, for he might be vexed that she had come that way without telling him beforehand. But he was not near No. 10 lorry, which she knew to be his.

Beyond the lorries they came upon a hospital for sick horses. Some of the poor beasts had been shaved so close that they seemed to have no hair at all, but what was wrong with them it was impossible to conjecture.

The streets of Vitry were always full of soldiers—men who had one or two hours' leave from their barracks or camp to come into the town. It was a

dreary place for them. There was no amusement or recreation, and they sauntered in melancholy fashion from one shop-window to another. Round the newspaper shop and the greengrocer's there was always a small crowd.

One day Madame Plon took Isabelle to see her adopted soldier's grave in the cemetery. Before leaving, they dug out of her garden a little rose-bush, and some violet and primrose roots which were just about to flower, to plant them on the grave. After reaching and crossing the cemetery belonging to the town, they made their way through the trees and came upon the soldiers' enclosure. An exclamation of horror escaped Isabelle. For rows upon rows of uniform little wooden crosses stretched far down the slope. These graves had been dug not by tens but by hundreds. The first sight of one such cemetery in France can never be effaced from the memory, and Isabelle was deeply moved. To hear from Madame Plon that at Châlons the cemetery was bigger still was no consolation. How cruel it seemed! It was a lovely day, just like spring, a day to remind you of flowers and fresh growth and youth. The thought had evidently struck many women to come on such a day to tend their adopted graves, for there were many already there. Like themselves, all had brought plants. The grave to which Isabelle was led was that of a lad of twenty, who had been wounded at the beginning of the war. He had been brought to the hospital at Vitry, and it was Madame Plon's sister who had nursed him. When he had died, Madame Plon had undertaken to tend his grave. His mother, a poor old Breton woman, had sent her five francs for a wreath, and she had bought an artificial one on

which was inscribed a loving motto such as the Breton mother would have chosen herself.

There was already a little green border round the grave, and they now planted within it the spring flowers and the rose-tree.

On leaving the cemetery, Madame Plon took Isabelle to see the hospital where her sister was nursing. It consisted of long low wooden huts. It had been built and organized by a lady from Biarritz, and she and her daughter (who had given half her dot towards the expenses) were indefatigable workers. Though Vitry itself did not possess electricity, this and the other hospitals had provided their own electric light. Madame Plon's sister was busy, and was unable to show them over that afternoon; she could not be lightly spared, for from a raw probationer she had grown to be one of the most valuable nurses on the staff. Her story was a sad one. She and her husband were living not far from Maubeuge when war broke out. He was called up on one of the first days of August, and she pluckily took over his work as so many wives have done. But very soon he got a message through to her to flee the place—and though he was in Maubeuge itself, quite close to her, he could do nothing to help her. But she was already late in starting, for the exodus from the district had begun and no train, carriage, or vehicle of any sort was available. She and her son of twelve were forced to start on foot. They walked many, many miles, getting a few chance lifts, until they finally reached Vitry-le-François. At that time, Madame Plon's husband and son were still with her, and her home seemed to her poor sister a sure and certain refuge. Alas! a few days later they were told that the Germans would probably enter

the town that evening! They must fly again! and this time the Plons also. They shut up and barricaded the house as best they could, buried in the garden their most valuable possessions, and started off by train.

On their return a week or so later, the danger being over, they found to their joy that their house had been untouched. All they lost was a bicycle, which young Plon had hidden in a shed. A neighbour, who had remained, described how some German soldiers had knocked at the door, and how they had climbed on to the top of the high gate. But after looking over into the garden, they jumped down again and continued their way up the street.

A few weeks later Madame Plon's husband was called up, and her sister was taken as a paid nurse at the newly established hospital. She was at that time still without news of her husband, but since Maubeuge was taken she knew he must be either wounded, dead, or a prisoner. After many months she was informed that he was a prisoner in Germany, but her relief was short-lived, for shortly after, the news came that he had died of consumption. Consumption!—he, such a strong and healthy man! What a story of hardship and privation was revealed by that word! She threw herself more ardently than ever into her nursing, her only regret about the hard work being that she saw very little of her son, as she was in the hospital from seven in the morning till late in the evening.

The walks with Madame Plon, and the stories she told of her friends and relations, gave Isabelle a clearer idea of what war really meant than she had possessed before. They brought home to her the terrors and horrors of invasion, and the indescribable sufferings of some of the women.

In the evening, Isabelle would tell de Gaurival all she had seen and heard, and this would call forth further stories from him.

The even tenor of their happy life in the little flat had lasted about a month, when one evening de Gaurival came back with a hard expression on his face.

"There is a rumour that we are leaving for the front."

"When?"

"It may be to-night, it may be to-morrow, it may be the next day."

"Oh, Gauri, is it all over—our lovely time?"

"Yes, you must go."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Not so soon as that!"

"Probably."

"I feel certain this is a false alarm."

There had been rumours from time to time before, but they had melted away almost as soon as they had been started. These alarms had roused just sufficient anxiety in the lovers' minds to intensify the enjoyment and appreciation of their present life.

They had known the blow must fall one day, but it did not seem to make the shock less great when it did come. They had been spending that afternoon in a little tub-boat on the river. Isabelle had rowed up-stream for a mile or so; they had rested by the bank in the shade, and later had drifted slowly back to their starting-point. It was a new amusement, and one that enabled them to avoid the everlasting mud of the roads, and they had promised themselves to repeat it at the first opportunity.

And was it, after all, to be the first and last boating expedition?

The next morning—it was February 19—de Gaurival came back before Isabelle was up.

"C'est l'alerte définitive. Pack your things. You must return to Paris this evening. We shall probably leave in the night or early to-morrow."

"Gauri!"

"Please don't say anything. If all your preparations are finished by lunch-time, we will go for a last walk together this afternoon." She acquiesced silently, for she could see how keenly he was feeling the impending separation.

On his return two hours later he found her calm and quiet. All her preparations had been made, and according to promise, they started out together as soon as they had lunched.

They decided to go to a spot, the highest in the whole neighbourhood. Hitherto they had always avoided this walk, because it took them along the much-frequented Châlons road. Now, what did it matter? Why should they mind being seen together, for, it was perhaps, the last time?

They left the highroad some kilometres from Vitry, and clambered up a grassy hillside. They sat down on the top of the hill, and with Isabelle's stick Gauri pointed out all the landmarks—the Marne flowing sluggishly at their feet, Vitry, Châlons, and the bombarded villages between the two. This was where the Battle of the Marne had been fought; they were actually in the area of the historic and ever-famous battlefield. Isabelle had always imagined a battle as being fought within certain more or less definite bounds, within an area of which every part might be visible at the same time. But this gigantic battlefield comprised many towns and villages and acres of woods

and fields, and in spite of the great distance they could see, they were well aware that they were now only looking upon a small portion of it.

A group of women and girls passed close to them, accompanied by one or two soldiers. They were evidently looking for souvenirs, such as pieces of shell or shrapnel, cartridge clips or bullets. Larger trophies, such as German helmets, packs, and weapons, had been picked up in quantities during the first days after the fighting round Vitry; but now such were rare. The laughter and chatter of these men and women jarred upon the lovers, for they were at the moment deeply moved by the scene before them as they tried to reconstruct the past. Thoughts, too, of the immediate future gripped them: she so soon to return to Paris; he to start that very evening into the unknown with his section. They felt a battle pending, danger threatening, a crisis coming. And even their own separation was thrust for a minute from their minds by the events which they felt to be imminent for their country.

As they walked along Isabelle said:

"Gauri, this is our last day together here. I must say something to you."

"Say it."

"This has been a wonderful month, hasn't it, for both of us? Do you know that through your fault we very nearly missed it? Why did not you ask me plainly and openly to come here? Why did not you hold out to me the promise of even a little of all that you have given me?"

"I will never plead with you for anything. I have told you before, and I repeat it. I will never again be at your feet."

"Gauri, how can you talk like that? Is it fair that

you should always leave all initiative to me? Now that in my turn I am so yielding, I think you might be kinder."

"Yielding! But that would not last long if I gave you the chance!"

"I didn't mind taking the initiative, because I knew in my heart, whatever you said or did not say, that you wanted me; but I did not even know if it was possible to reach you. It was therefore pure luck that I tried. Would you have missed this ideal month rather than invite me to come?"

"Certainly!"

"No Gauri! it was because you imagined I was as likely, perhaps more likely, to come if you did *not* ask me as if you did. Otherwise it was impossible! But listen—in future I want you to *ask* me to come, and I want to have the pleasure of obeying you. When I am with you you compel obedience from me."

There was a pause, but as de Gaurival did not answer Isabelle went on:

"Gauri, do be kinder to me! I don't ask it only for my own sake. I want it too for your own. Do you think I don't see quite plainly by your whole demeanour when I'm here, and by your letters, when I'm away from you, that it would make you happier? To speak out generously and open-heartedly would be such a relief to *you* yourself. You suffer so by all the restraint you put upon yourself."

"If I did not control myself I could not control you."

"Of course you must control yourself, but it need not always make you so hard with yourself and me."

"You think I am too masterful, *mon amie?* But I assure you it is necessary in your case."

"No, not now. You have changed me; besides, the war has changed everything. Once I was content to wait for a thing, fondly imagining the looking forward to be as good or better than the thing itself; but now that death is everywhere, I feel one cannot wait. The present is all in all. This wonderful month has been ours; nobody can take it from us, because we have had it. Yet through your fault we might have missed it. I can't forgive you when I think of it!"

"You have been so happy?"

"You know I have, Gauri; and even that night last week when you made me cry, I did not regret anything even for an instant."

"Yes, we have had this month, but was it worth having to part again like this? We may never meet again."

"We shall, Gauri; I know we shall, if we both live. You may refuse to think about it or to make plans, but I know we shall."

They sat in silence on the grassy hillside-top, and in silence they wended their way home. Each understood the other too intimately for any need of spoken words. A slight pressure of hand to hand or shoulder to shoulder was sufficient expression.

A hasty dinner and a rush to the station were followed by a good-bye in the dark damp street at the station entrance. It was dangerous for de Gaurival to show himself in the bright light inside the building, but he promised to wait outside till the train arrived, and ascertain that she was safely in. Isabelle was asked no questions this time by the military police as she entered the station; it was easier to leave the war zone than to enter it.

From her crowded compartment she waved to

de Gaurival as the train slowly left the station. He was standing just beyond it, and in spite of the darkness they recognized each other.

The very next morning in Paris, Isabelle heard the word "Verdun," and felt intuitively that that was where her lover had been sent.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE VERDUN ROAD

" T.M., 300,
" *March* 15, 1916.

" I HAVE received all your letters safely—the last dated March 10. I apologize for the silence for which you reproach me, but please remember that on your arrival in Paris you wrote me a certain letter which as good as told me not to write to you. Anyhow, whether you meant it or not, it had that effect. If you wish for letters from me, I advise you to pay attention to what you say in your own. I must tell you, also, that the three weeks we have been here we have had very hard work, passing whole days and nights at the wheel. We are encamped in a large village. When we have a few hours' rest, I do no more than write a line to my family. I laze, I eat, I sleep, and hardly feel sufficiently energetic for the unravelling of your letters, which are usually complicated with a double meaning.

" You understand, therefore, that you are under no obligation whatever to write to me for a little while, and have a right to arrange your life and your comings and goings without any regard to me.

" Have no anxiety as to my health—it was never better.

" We had hardly arrived in this village on February 22, when my detachment of lorries began the work of conveying shells to a part of the line which you

may perhaps guess. These shells, which we fetch from a neighbouring depot, packing them into our lorries singly or in cases, we carry in an uninterrupted line towards the front. We journey to and fro along this great road which is exclusively reserved for our lorries. It is like the ever-moving leather strap which drives the great wheel of a machine. On the return journey we bring wounded or refugees, or sometimes come back empty, but each journey represents for each of us eighteen or twenty-five, or even thirty hours at the wheel, and from one hundred and eighty to two hundred kilometres.

"This goes on day and night. On first arriving here we did this journey twice on end with hardly a break between—that is to say, we were forty-eight hours without sleeping and almost without eating. It was so fearfully tiring that it was decided to put one driver only per lorry, instead of two as before, and let them make the journey in turns.

"I do not think you can imagine what it means to drive one of these lorries weighing five tons and carrying an equal weight in shells. (We have about a hundred three-ton Berlier and five-ton Saurer lorries.) Think of a descent of twelve to fourteen degrees with this weight behind, and remember it is impossible to go one's own pace, because forced to keep one's place in the file. Or worse still, think of us driving thus, not by daylight, but on a frosty night with lamps extinguished—necessary when nearing the front. Think of the driver alone on his car, so weary that his eyes close in spite of himself, till a sudden shock rouses him to his danger, and he has to sing, sit very upright, curse and swear so as not to sleep, for if he does so he will certainly hurl his car

into a ditch or get it stuck in the mud, or crash into the car just in front. And to make matters worse, there is a continual line of hundreds and hundreds of cars coming in the opposite direction, which blind him with their interminable lights. If you can imagine all this, then be happy and sleep comfortably, *you*, at night.

" The snow has disappeared. For a day or two our road was covered with a thick coating of snow. The drivers who were resting scarcely left the little café at the hotel, where they played cards and billiards. I went for a walk in a wood close by. All the trees were covered with snow. Impossible to imagine anything more beautiful than this sight, anything purer! And yet one hesitates to call it beautiful, because one suddenly remembers the poor wretches who are suffering from this same snow over there at Verdun.

" The day before yesterday I left at five p.m., and only returned yesterday at ten a.m. I slept yesterday from one to seven, and from ten p.m. till eight this morning, in a little room in the hotel which I have been lucky enough to get hold of. Just now there is a radiant sun; it is spring; life is good.

" These are, chère Madame, some of the reasons why I have not written to you.

" Did you see Mr. and Mrs. Fuller in Paris? They were there at the end of February, if the extract from the *Daily Mail* which I send you is correct.

" Please tell me if you have heard anything of Blau lately.

" You probably know that since the Verdun offensive started all leave has been stopped for at least a month, so that I cannot count on mine for a long time to come.

"I have met once more the men of my old 442nd regiment. They were breaking stones and mending the roads which our heavy lorries have cut up. I was not able to halt in the village, unfortunately, where my Commandant was billeted.

"Adieu, dear Madame; here comes the spring, the spring which makes all things joyous. Make the most of it."

"*March* 20.

"CHÈRE MADAME,

"I consider, as you do, the opportunity unique for you to go to Alexandria with your father; and very truly, I advise you to take it and start off as soon as possible, without the slightest anxiety on my behalf. I shall not get my leave for at least two months from now. Leave was stopped in the middle of February and has not yet begun again.

"The village where I am is surrounded by woods, which will soon be very pretty, and less than six kilometres from here there is a town (B. D.). I can go there pretty easily between my long runs. I certainly could ask you to come there, but I do not, for reasons before stated. I wish to spend my days of rest in perfect quiet, to laze, read, and sleep. At these times I distinctly prefer to be without all those complications which you represent for me.

"It is probable that our detachment will go into a rest camp soon—before a month is out, I hope. When that time comes I will let you know if we are in an accessible spot. But you have plenty of time to go to Alexandria and back. Go there. I am somewhat disappointed to learn of the fear you seem to feel at the idea of danger from submarines. Indeed, Madame! Are Englishwomen really so nervous and

so little desirous of new experiences? You astonish me!

"To change the subject. You must please accustom yourself not to ask my advice, and you must learn to know for yourself what you ought or ought not to do.

"My Bank wrote to my mother over a month ago, asking her my exact military employment and my address. I conclude that an appeal is being made for my recall, for they need me badly in Algiers. If their appeal is successful, I shall be suddenly released, in which case I must take the first boat for Africa.

"Will you, I wonder, still continue even then to ask my advice, which can only reach you a fortnight later? I hope not; and besides, I know from experience that it takes you less time than that to decide on a course, be it good or bad!

"This time I will advise you, as you seem so anxious for my opinion. Seize this opportunity which is offered you. Make this delightful voyage and banish the absurd fear of submarines. What! You show the nervousness of a child! If there was no war on, your journey would not be specially interesting, whereas just now it will be very much so."

"*March* 26.

"And so you are going to London instead of to Alexandria! As you will!

"You ask me for my notes, as I have told you so little of my life on a lorry. It is true I have kept a sort of diary, pretty regularly lately, but it was meant for myself alone. I lend it you with reluctance, and beg you to return it as soon as you have finished with it."

"*March* 6, *Ance.*—On February 19 all the lorry detachments at Vitry-le-François were finally called up. We went to Bar-le-Duc, a pretty little industrial

town, and our interminable procession of lorries stretched out along the road from the station onwards. The hotels were full up, and I passed the night in my lorry. The next morning we moved out on to the highroad two kilometres away from the town.

"In the evening about eight-thirty, while on a stroll with a friend, we see that what we have been taking for falling stars are really incendiary shells. Puzzled by them, we watch attentively, and suddenly see an immense red sheet of flame burst forth in the sky and light up the whole country round, and then fall slowly towards the earth. We did not understand what it was till the next morning, when we heard about the Zeppelin being brought down by the artillery at Revigny. Brabant-le-Roi is ten kilometres away, and too far for us to go and see.

"The next morning, up at four a.m. Inauguration of our new work, which consists of going to the station of Baudonvillers, loading our lorries with shells, for our "75's" and "155's," and taking them to Heippe, Lemmes, or Londrecourt near Verdun. Leaving Monday at eleven a.m., we only return Tuesday at midday—twenty-five hours later. At four p.m. we leave Bar-le-Duc and arrive at Ance at five p.m. At six—an hour later—we start off again for Baudonvillers and Haippes, returning to Ance at three p.m. the next day—which means that we were forty-eight hours at work in the cold, in the snow, with no sleep and for all food a little cold meat and bread.

"Such hard work was a contrast after our long rest at Vitry, where we were able to sleep ten hours every night. The work was so trying that it was decided to have only one driver per lorry. By taking

the lorry in turns, one driver would have time to rest and sleep. And this life has lasted two weeks already. In the night, a shrill whistle. Ten minutes later the engines are in motion, the lamps are lit. Another whistle, and a detachment moves forward, then another. And away they all go, each man provided with two cold meals for eighteen, twenty-four, or even thirty hours.

"It is a sight worth seeing, especially at night, this uninterrupted procession of lorries and lights moving along in opposite directions on the road between Bar-le-Duc and Verdun, which is reserved exclusively for motor-lorries since the German offensive. It is said that there are some five thousand lorries coming and going day and night, for the supply of ammunition for the Verdun army. Each head-light shows up the lorry in front, and at all costs that lorry must not be lost sight of. It is all we see in the darkness, except the lamps of the other stream of lorries passing us in the opposite direction.

"Driving my Saurer thus day after day, I have the satisfaction of feeling that I am at last useful and a link in a great chain. That gives me courage. With all we possess on our backs, and a goatskin over all, we fight against the cold, and still more against sleep. As soon as there is a halt of a few seconds we sleep immediately, in spite of the falling snow and the noisy engine. My Saurer is a veritable monster, weighing five thousand kilogrammes and capable of carrying eighty shells for the "155's," and several cases of incendiary ones—that is to say, some five thousand kilogrammes. When you descend a hill in the middle of a village and feel this weight of ten thousand kilogrammes coming down too quickly, you

press with all your might on the motor brake, the foot brake, and the hand brake. It is pretty nerve-racking! And one's nerves are not improved by the sight of the numbers of wounded who fill the lorries on the return journey, or of the lorries stuck or overturned in the mud, or worse still, fallen down the bank and wedged against a tree or wall.

"What an immense collection of shells at the dump! They are of all calibres, all colours. There are mountains of shells, too, along the roads and in the fields near Haippes, Lemmes, and Londrecourt. Headquarters must be absolutely confident of holding the Boches to accumulate thus so much ammunition near Verdun. I should not be surprised if preparations were not even now being made to give them terrible punishment at this very corner, where they have dared attack us. You may be sure we shall take the offensive when the opportunity occurs."

"*March* 10.—My T.M. 300 started off the day before yesterday at six p.m. It was my turn to take charge of the lorry, which I had got ready in the morning. We were back at five o'clock yesterday evening.

"We loaded up as usual at Baudonvillers, and unloaded at Billemont on a hill two or three kilometres to the east of Verdun. We were thus twenty-three hours on the road, for a distance of one hundred and seventy kilometres. A terrible crush at Baudonvillers. Lights everywhere and all the engines working. The lorries all load up at the same time, and almost touch each other. There is not more than twenty centimetres between our lorries and those of the next detachment. We wait an hour, and it is freezing. I recognize the other detachment of Saurer motors, and know that Tolland must be there. After a bit

he comes and finds me. In the midst of the confusion and noise we chat for a few minutes. It is my turn at last to manœuvre my lorry into position near the railway-trucks for my load. We are ordered to extinguish our lamps. A Zeppelin has been signalled. We continue loading all night, nevertheless.

"When loaded up, we leave about ten p.m. and pass along the road with which we are now familiar—Saudrupt, Brillon, Bar-le-Duc, Chaumont-sur-Aise, Haippes, Souilly Lemmes, and then the Verdun road. In spite of the noise of the engines we hear the cannonade, which is terrible. I recognize the heavy artillery. I see again the bursting of the shells, which indicates to me the places of carnage.

"And just at this moment we are again ordered to extinguish all lights, big and small. We start again in complete darkness, our eyes fixed in front. I find it very wearying, especially as I am dead with sleep. It must be about four or five in the morning. The sensation of feeling that one is sleeping in spite of oneself is horrible. By a great effort of will I sit up, I sing, I try to realize the danger of going to sleep. I have seen plenty of overturned lorries, but what has become of the drivers? It is so difficult to see whether I am keeping pace with the lorries in front. Suddenly, on the narrow road of which it is impossible to see the edges, a lorry comes rumbling towards me, then a second, then a third, all without lights. Instinctively I pull my lorry to the right. Nothing gives way or jars, and I am still moving. The same manœuvre three times, and three times I am surprised not to have grazed the lorry on the left nor to have stuck in the mud on the right. A little later I see something black on the road a few yards in front of me.

I think I have just avoided it when—bang! I come to a full-stop with my ten thousand kilogrammes. It is an overturned cart left on the road. I am not much damaged. I back, I turn and go forward again.

"At last I catch up the other lorries. We arrive at our destination. A little chocolate and cognac to wake me, a cigarette, then a little exercise to recover warmth and feeling.

"The day breaks gloomy and snowy. We see Verdun on our left, quite close. Some barracks opposite the cathedral on the left. All that we can see appears undamaged. The cannonade redoubles in activity as soon as it is light. It is the prelude to the next attack. We are standing there on the hill waiting our turn to unload, when two Moroccan regiments pass by. They have been sleeping in the woods, and are now going towards Verdun to be taken by motors to an unknown destination. The poor wretches are so stiff and frozen that they can hardly place one foot before the other. The non-coms. ask us for newspapers, even though they be several days old.

"About seven o'clock we have finished unloading and, now empty, I find my lorry easy to drive, and mount the hills often on the fourth speed.

"We go through a suburb of Verdun. All the houses are shut up and deserted. Just as we are leaving the town we are stopped. A dressing-station, doubtless recently established, requires our assistance to transport its lightly wounded. I have no ladder, and I help to haul them up into my lorry. All seem worn out and bewildered—their eyes haggard. They have probably just come out of that awful hell yonder, for two hours later I find them quite different, more

natural, and eating with appetite. On leaving this suburb, our whole detachment is again stopped.

"We have to wait a whole hour. Verdun is being shelled, the citadel and all around it, and once the shells fall not very far from us. At last we start off again. We meet hundreds of Dion motor-buses, which are probably going to fetch the Moroccans—also a quantity of American ambulances. I see the 153rd regiment of the twentieth army and some cavalry. All this movement of troops reminds me of the great days in Champagne.

"My engine has gone wrong, and I have again not been able to keep my place in the line. It is very annoying, for we are threatened with imprisonment or with immediate incorporation in a first-line unit if we pass another car, or if we do more than fifteen kilometres an hour. But I want to catch up the others, so at every hill I let her go her fastest. At the bottom of one incline I see an officer take out his glasses and try to see the number of my detachment and my lorry. It was rather bad luck, for just before meeting him, I had been slackening speed because the road was so terribly bad. It was near Haippes, and the lorry received such violent jerks that I was sorry for the poor wounded wretches inside. I had warned them before starting that they would be very much shaken in my five-ton car, and indeed they found I spoke truly; but in my quick driving, they had, on the other hand, the consolation of the sooner reaching a haven of peace.

"At Bar-le-Duc Station about midday I helped them down. There were a number of wounded already there, brought by several of our people.

"We were obliged to go right out of our way at

Bar-le-Duc, so as to avoid the chain of lorries which must on no account be interrupted. Order is kept by the military police.

"I do not know if there are statistics recording the number of lorries which roll thus interminably towards Verdun day and night, of the shells transported thither, and of the lorries overturned or stuck in the mud. They would make interesting reading. It is said that the railway has been cut, and that the principal element of success in the defence of Verdun is this transport of munitions by road. Headquarters we hear, is delighted with the result, for the scheme is on trial for the first time. This consoles us for our nights spent at the wheel. We are told that there are six thousand eight hundred lorries supplying the Verdun army. I am not surprised to hear it.

"As I near Ance I think of my bed. There is nothing in the world I want so much.

"Unfortunately, it has been snowing since midday, and just as we were going up the last hill—it is through woods and very pretty—we find a three-ton Berliet stuck and barring our road. We must haul it out of the way. No. 11 Saurer takes it in tow, but it is not enough—we must all get down and push.

"Ance at last, at five p.m. The window of my little room in the hotel! What a sweet sound the word has! A little hot water for a wash, and then dinner, though I am not hungry. Eight o'clock bed—and what is best of all, twelve hours to sleep."

"*March* 15.—Left the day before yesterday at five p.m., returned yesterday at ten a.m.; but this time there was a splendid moon, and it was not cold. We left our ammunition at Maison Rouge, near Verdun. Day broke early, and we saw a magnificent

sunrise over the Meuse country. It felt like spring. Now our trouble will be dust. The cold is over.

"Near Chaumont-sur-Aire I found the men of the 442nd breaking stones along miles of road. They were all wearing spectacles. I recognized my comrades of the 11th Company. I wonder if they have all had their first leave yet? I doubt it, and I pity them —my poor Basques. At any rate, they are now out of danger, and are far from Aix-Noulettes, where we ran daily risk of death.

"I cannot stop at Chaumont to speak to my old C.O.

"On leaving Verdun, I witnessed the sad sight of numbers of refugees carrying with them all their possessions in a cart, their animals tied at the back. Lorries have been ordered to take all the inhabitants to Bar-Quelle. What a pitiful thing to have to leave one's home!—especially when one is old and poor.

"At Baudonviller I nearly overturned in the dark. One wheel went right into the ditch. My pal behind told me afterwards he thought I could not possibly avoid an accident. Just before this we had heard that two 'White' lorries had been burnt on the Saudrupt hill. One had missed changing gear, and had rolled backwards, bursting its petrol tank by contact with the lorry behind. The lamp fired the petrol and set fire to both lorries. Of sixteen unfortunate poilus, who were in the front car going to rest after the hell at Verdun, only eight escaped, and one of these went mad.

"Many lorries need overhauling. The roads have become very bad. Fortunately, we are now working less hard. Some of us rest twenty-four hours and sometimes thirty-six between our runs."

"*April* 1, 1916.

"Many thanks for the return of the diary received yesterday. Your letter of to-day brings me an article from *The Times* about our munition lorries. It has greatly interested me, and I thank you very much for it. The newspapers are also reaching me safely."

"*April* 12.

"I wrote to you this morning from Ance telling you that we are now resting, and that, if you like, you could come here for a little while. The country is pretty, the woods are getting more lovely every day, and it is far enough from the front for you to come without difficulty. Several wives of officers and soldiers have already arrived at Ance without anything being said. There is a train from Paris at twelve, which arrives at Ance about five. If you decide to join me, come quickly. Remember not to wire to me. Write only. To-day is Wednesday. In case your letter does not arrive in time, I will go to the station at Ance to meet you on Friday the 14th, and the following day, Saturday 15th, to see if you are there."

CHAPTER XII

IN THE BEECHES

ISABELLE only received this letter on the first of the two days mentioned by de Gaurival. It was impossible to get her "sauf-conduit" signed and her preparations made in time for the train on the morrow, so she wrote off immediately saying she would come on Sunday.

So he had really bent his proud spirit and asked her to come at last! What a triumph! He had let a whole month elapse before writing to her after she had left him at Vitry, and since then his letters had given no hopes of a near meeting—he had even gone so far as to urge her to go to Alexandria; and now, suddenly, he wrote to her to join him again! She had not known where he was, and even "B. D." that he had once mentioned had given her no clue. Bar-le-Duc! Of course! How could she have been so stupid!

During the first week or two after their separation she had raged against him and at what she called his ingratitude at not writing to thank her for those happy weeks spent together; and it was difficult to forgive his heartlessness in not informing her of his safety when the terrible inferno at Verdun was giving everyone so much anxiety. But as the weeks passed and there was still no news, her feelings changed from anger to fear and an awful dread. Perhaps he was

ill or wounded, perhaps even dead! She thought of writing to his family for news of him, but was loath to run the risk of complications.

It was not until his first letter arrived and called attention to it, that she reflected on the tone and current of her own letters when she had returned to Paris. After so long an absence she had had difficulty in picking up the threads of her ordinary life, in allaying the suspicions of her sister, in putting off the airy banter of her more intimate friends, and in her endeavour to make the life of Paris appear to be her sole preoccupation. She had rather tactlessly, as she now realized, related all her worries to him, and he, instead of showing sympathy and understanding, had simply turned the cold shoulder and not answered at all. It had irritated him to hear all these details which seemed so petty to him, at a time when he was facing death and hardship; but if he talked of her complicating his life, why should he not be made to see that he also complicated hers? The remembrance of this grievance now flashed through Isabelle's mind as she read this his last letter.

He asked her to join him! What an opportunity for punishing him for his cruelty! She called to remembrance her sleepless nights when he had not written, the tears she had shed, her efforts to appear calm when worry was almost killing her. And yet, while her brain was engaged in enumerating her late sufferings in order to pay him back in his own coin, her hand was writing to him to announce her arrival on Sunday. Before her letter was finished, she was arranging to put off all engagements, making plans for a quick departure, and was even regretting that he might have to go twice to the station to meet her

in vain. As a matter of fact, she did not hesitate for a second; she did not in the least regret once more leaving her Paris life, into which she had thrown herself with zest, and any complications which might again ensue were negligible in comparison with joining Gauri once more.

Isabelle took the same train at the Gare de l'Est as on her last journey to the war zone, for she had to change at Vitry-le-François. The halts and delays were so frequent on this overcrowded line that she feared she might lose the connection there, but fortunately the train was waiting for them. There was a further delay of some ten minutes in the station, for two enormously long trains, one coming from and one going to Verdun, prevented the crossing of the line to the Bar-le-Duc train till they had gone out. What a contrast these two trains presented! On one, the gun-carriages were encrusted with mud; many trucks were loaded with what looked like a mass of broken-up iron and rubbish; the men, crowded into horse-boxes, were unshaven, dirty, and unkempt, though wonderfully fit on the whole, considering all things. Here and there, however, were men who looked haggard in the extreme, and whose eyes showed clear traces of the horrors they had experienced. Those who would understand something of the suffering of the men engaged in this struggle, should see a unit coming straight from the front lines, or go to the Gare de l'Est in Paris and stand at the "Sortie pour les militaires" (not, of course, the officers' exit), and watch the faces of the soldiers returning for their four days' leave. Men come staggering out into the street, bewildered. Maybe it is the fatigue of the journey, combined with the sudden sight of so many anxious

faces all on the lookout for husbands, sons, and brothers.

On the train going to Verdun, on the other hand, the gun-carriages were spick and span, the canvas coverings were new. Not a strap or string was missing, the horses and men looked healthy and alert, and their equipment and packs were in first-rate order.

Isabelle crossed the line as soon as the way was clear, and clambered with other passengers into the waiting train. In her compartment was a flying man, an infantry officer, and a woman, and they all talked of the war. At Bar-le-Duc the two men left the train, and Isabelle gathered up courage to ask her companion if she knew Ance. If by any chance she should be a native of the place she might possibly be of help to her in passing the police at the station. Isabelle had her *laissez-passer* all right, but if, as sometimes happened, she were not allowed out of the station, and were to be sent back to Paris, she knew it would be a somewhat serious catastrophe, for there was no train back that day, and she would have to stay in the station all night.

The woman could give Isabelle no help, having come to Bar-le-Duc in much the same circumstances as herself. Their knowledge of the village amounted to very little, for neither had received many details, in case the letters should fall into the hands of the military authorities. Their anxiety increased as they approached the end of their journey. But after all, they found their fears had been groundless, for the critical moment passed safely, and they were quickly out of the station. Isabelle's companion was at once joined by two soldiers, her husband and a friend, but no one

was awaiting her. Her new friend invited her to go along with them, as it was a two-mile walk to the village. She accepted gladly, for she did not know where to go, and as usual wished to avoid mentioning de Gaurival's name. On the way she determined to confide in the husband, and told him her difficulties. He advised her to go to the hotel—a small inn—and offered to take a note to de Gaurival, if he could find him, to say she was waiting there for him. When he heard the number of the detachment, however, he said that it had left the village for Verdun that morning, and would probably not be back till the middle of the night. Isabelle tried not to show her disappointment and anxiety, and agreed to take a room at the hotel if there was one vacant. They all had to separate when the village was reached, for there were soldiers and officers everywhere. Isabelle made her way to the inn, but both the kitchen and the café were full of soldiers, and she had an anxious moment, till the wife of the *propriétaire* noticed her and led her to an empty bedroom, which she said had been engaged for her. She had been told, she said, to expect her about that time. Isabelle's mind was thus set at rest, and when, after a little demur, she persuaded the woman to bring her something to eat upstairs, she really began to enjoy her adventure, unpacked her little bag, and made herself at home.

Suddenly there were heavy footsteps in the passage and a knock at the door. Isabelle opened it. There was de Gaurival. For a second she hardly recognized him. Clad in his thick goat-skin he filled up the whole of the doorway. He was white from head to foot—clothes, gaiters, skin, lips, eyelashes—a coating of dust

such as she had never seen or imagined. But that mattered nothing! It was he himself! What a triumph to have found him—to have really tracked him, as it were, to his corner in the war zone! It was wonderful!

He had been to the station to meet her on both the two preceding days, but this day his lorry, which had broken down, having been patched up, he had been obliged to take his place with his detachment and had only just arrived back.

Isabelle, who had tried to nurse her grievance against de Gaurival the whole day, when her hopes and fears of not reaching him allowed her to do so, forgot them all now in the joy of this meeting. How happy they were! and they made no effort to conceal it.

They dined together upstairs by the light of two candles, which, before the meal was over, they cut in half and made into four.

It was only by a superhuman effort that de Gaurival had succeeded in engaging two rooms; and he had his bedroom next door. A flat such as they had had at Vitry was out of the question here; many motor-drivers with plenty of money were sleeping in barns, and in all the village there was not a bed unoccupied. Sitting-rooms and even kitchens were being requisitioned to provide sleeping accommodation.

The next morning Isabelle made a survey of her surroundings from the bedroom-window. The street, not very wide at the best of times, was lined for its whole length on one side and far beyond the bounds of the village with monster T.M. (Transport Matériel) cars. They dwarfed the houses and the men who, even at that early hour, were already cleaning the engines and scraping mud from the woodwork.

De Gaurival hoped that his lorry, which was still in need of repairs, would be taken in hand that morning, and that he would therefore be free for a day or two. But he found to his annoyance that the mechanics had decided it could stand a few more runs.

As, however, his next journey would not begin till night-time, and as it was a most beautiful day and very warm, they made up their minds to take lunch and picnic in the woods.

No sight could have been more beautiful than these beech-woods in April. The delicate green of the leaves was incomparable with any other fresh green in all that glorious spring. Each spreading branch seemed a miracle in itself, and there were miles upon miles of beeches and nothing else. The ground was covered with lilies of the valley not yet in flower, but the blue-grey shoots made a fresh and enchanting carpet. The primroses were over, but Isabelle picked many anemones and other early spring flowers.

Alone in the forest amidst all this beauty, they were reminded of Ramadet. Were they going to have as happy a time as this time last year? Contentment, satisfaction, and quiet joy slowly pervaded all their being, and they forgot all grievances against each other, their separation, even their wild joy of the evening before. They were both tired out with their emotions, and lay resting on the ground, often silent for long intervals. They recognized that all the joys of Ramadet were impossible, for there was no Villa Madeleine. Quite the contrary. They were in an hotel crowded with soldiers, and in a village packed to its extreme limits; besides which, de Gaurival might be called out for long periods at any moment of the day or night.

As he had feared, a shrill whistle in the street woke

them that very night just as they had fallen asleep. De Gaurival opened the window, spoke to someone in the street, and turning to Isabelle told her that his detachment was starting immediately. In less than five minutes he had left the room, having put on in that time three pairs of socks, two or three vests, a leather waistcoat, and a thick tunic and breeches. He carried his sheep-skin over his shoulder.

Isabelle ran to the window, and saw the drivers hurrying up and down the road with lamps and buckets and petrol-tins in their hands. They were hovering around their cars, having a last look at this or that screw, though every night it was compulsory, before darkness set in, for every car to be ready for an immediate start. Some started their engines to make sure they were all right, while others lighted their acetylene head-lights and the little red lamps in the rear. Isabelle recognized in one of these shadowy figures de Gaurival, and saw him cross the road and speak to a pal, from whom he evidently borrowed something, and then return to his lorry.

The night was very dark, but a few lights shining from the windows in the street made outlines distinguishable. Suddenly de Gaurival came rushing upstairs again. He told Isabelle that from what he could gather he would not be back till the next evening, and rushed off again. All the engines were by now whirring and working; suddenly there was a shrill whistle; the drivers sprang to their seats and the first lorry disengaged itself from the others and moved down the middle of the road. Another followed a few yards behind, then another, looking like gigantic monsters in the darkness. Then there was a pause; by craning her neck Isabelle could see one poor man

struggling with his crank. The engine would not start. At last somebody came to his help and he was able to take his place in the line. The lieutenant commanding the detachment had meanwhile come back in his little car to see what was wrong; now there was another shrill whistle, the lorries went forward again, and as each turned the corner at the end of the village some five hundred yards away she saw their lamps flash out. Soon the heavy rumble of the monsters was no longer to be heard, and frozen, she crept back into bed.

The next morning she did not go out, but she saw a whole world equipped for war from her window, for she looked out on to one of the national highroads between Verdun and Paris. First it was a battalion, or maybe it was a whole regiment of infantry marching east. They looked strong, healthy young fellows, and were walking easily though carrying rifles, packs, and a great many extras such as a second pair of nailed boots, a brown-paper parcel, or a bundle of firewood. Later on it was a cavalry unit, the men following each other in single file, each one leading a second horse. They were rather boys than men, certainly not more than seventeen or eighteen years of age; and were probably training, and had not been into the fighting-line yet. They looked up at the sign-post of the little hotel, and evidently longed to stop a minute for a drink.

About lunch-time Isabelle heard the sound of motors, and rushed to the window. It was not a T.M. detachment, however, but some twenty or thirty armoured cars carrying "75" guns. Isabelle had never seen such cars before. They were rather like hansom-cabs in shape. The drivers were quite hidden from view,

and she could not imagine how they could see to drive, though there must be, she thought, a peep-hole of glass somewhere. The three gunners sat perched up high behind the gun. The gun, pointing outwards and upwards, was covered with canvas.

These armoured motors, much lighter and smaller than the lorries, came flashing down the incline, following each other regularly at a distance of twenty yards or so. It was a thrilling spectacle.

Her hopes ran high when a detachment of T.P. passed, covered motors carrying men towards the front. Faces peered out of the windows, dodging the packs which were evidently suspended from the roof of the car.

Just as Isabelle was sitting down to dinner there was again a rumble of heavy cars. This time she had no doubt that the lorries were back. Yes, there was No. 4! She scanned the back of each one, looking out for No. 10. There was no No. 10, and soon all the lorries were in their places on either side of the street and quiet reigned again. Where was de Gaurival? Had he had a breakdown? Whom could she ask? After almost deciding to go out and make inquiries, she finally concluded she must run no risks of making herself known and must stay quietly indoors. Just as she had made up her mind regretfully that it was no use to wait, and was going to bed, she heard the sound of heavy motors again. They came to a standstill in the village street, but it was too dark to see anything. Then suddenly the street door opened and someone ran upstairs.

De Gaurival's lorry on the return journey had broken down a few miles away. He had struggled with it for ten minutes, and then the order had come

that those behind might pass him. He had made up his mind that he would have to stay there all night (for a driver must never leave his lorry) when his best pal, who was on the last lorry, took compassion on his plight, and offered to try and tow him. In this he had succeeded, and they had just arrived safely. If it had not been for the kindness of his friend he would have had to wait till the "repair" car had come to his rescue next morning. This little misadventure was not without luck, for he was now sure that his lorry would be thoroughly overhauled. He was right, and for several days he was in the happy position of being free from any sudden call, and could sleep peacefully through the whole night. During this time, except for putting in an appearance in the morning and lending a hand to the mechanics working at his lorry, he had nothing to do.

Every lorry detachment had its own repair shop, and it is only when large repairs have to be done that the cars are sent to a *parc*—their hospital.

For a whole week the lovers therefore spent nearly all their time in the beech-woods, taking lunch and books with them. Of course, they could not go or come back together, but running the gauntlet of the village street and getting safely to and from their rendezvous added a zest to their expeditions. They came to know almost every corner of the woods within walking distance, and loved certain spots not only for their beauty, but for their associations.

Once or twice they went farther afield. On Easter Sunday they decided to go and lunch at Bar-le-Duc, some six kilometres away. They arrived there about eleven, and went to the principal hotel. What a transformation from what was probably in peace-

time a quiet, humdrum, well-ordered inn! Every room was now turned into a dining-room, and every available space had been provided with tables and chairs. Long tables with benches, small tables, iron and wooden tables, round and square tables, filled the dining-rooms, sitting-rooms, halls, and reading-rooms. Soldiers and officers, many accompanied by women friends, were crowded together in one heterogeneous mass. De Gaurival and Isabelle waited till two chairs became vacant at a small table, and took rapid possession. The food was good and well served. Only surely by a stroke of genius could such a multitude be fed! thought Isabelle. Residents in the war zone, it is true, always show themselves capable of rising to any occasion and are prepared for any emergency. They have so long been faced with the problem of housing and feeding large numbers that they are not easily taken unawares. No doubt the hotel proprietor would be prepared for a great influx of visitors, for Sunday was the only day when soldiers were free to lunch where they liked. Nevertheless, catering must have been a difficult matter. These towns of the war zone not only hold great reserves of troops which come and go, but on Sundays they are over-run by hundreds of soldiers from neighbouring camps, who rush to any centre of civilization the moment they are free.

De Gaurival and Isabelle had begun eating and were chatting contentedly, when a man at a table close by suddenly got up and came towards them. Isabelle stared at him hypnotized. Who was he? It was someone she knew quite well. He came nearer. Was there no escape? He was speaking. She could not understand; her brain was paralyzed, and she felt

de Gaurival looking at her. This man knew her sister, knew her family, had known her as a girl. With a great effort she introduced the two men, mumbling de Gaurival's name indistinctly.

M. Fabre, who wore the stripes of a captain, explained that his regiment with many others was in reserve at a place some twenty kilometres from Bar-le-Duc. He said that this mass of men portended some tremendous event. Isabelle listened, but she knew that although he was talking and explaining at such length, he was expecting also to hear what *she* was doing at Bar-le-Duc. She was quite well aware of his wonder and curiosity. How and why had she come? Who was her companion? Isabelle had enough presence of mind to say nothing about herself. Not being able to give an explanation of her presence there which was lucid and credible, she was wise enough to give none at all. He soon left them, and Isabelle could not guess from his manner whether he divined the truth of the situation or not.

De Gaurival, who had remained silent during the conversation, now asked abruptly: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que tout ça?"

Isabelle explained how and where she had known Monsieur Fabre, then lapsed into silence, for the shock had been so great that she could hardly speak or eat. For the fact was, as soon as she was again with de Gaurival she forgot all about her other life, it disappeared entirely from her horizon—she could not believe that she had any other than that in which he was all in all to her. And to be thus suddenly reminded of it, not by a letter or by some casual association, but roughly in the living person of an old acquaintance, before the eyes of de Gaurival

in a public place, seemed to shake her to her very foundation.

De Gaurival soon became impatient with her silence, and showed no sympathy or understanding. With an effort she recovered herself, though now she looked around furtively, fearing an acquaintance at every turn. De Gaurival noticed this, and after a short time strode out of the hotel; she followed, still bewildered. The transformation of the streets and market square in these times was no less great than the transformation of the hotel. It was as if all the soldiers at the front had been given Sunday leave. The whole town was a mass of blue uniforms. The greatest crowd was in the square, where the band was playing.

At any other time, Isabelle would have delighted to walk in and out among the soldiers with de Gaurival, but after her experience at the hotel her chief desire was to return to the quiet of Ance as quickly as possible. She might meet M. Fabre again in the town, and he might renew the conversation.

They directed their steps towards the highroad again, and half-way to Ance, as it was still early in the afternoon, they went and rested in a wood. But there was a cloud over their excursion, and Isabelle regretted having come. Why had they ventured into towns when they had woods near at hand? This Sunday had been spoilt. Isabelle vowed it should be her first and last visit to a town.

One day de Gaurival came running upstairs to say that a whole regiment from Verdun was arriving in the village, and advised her to go and see what she could of them. Numbers of T.P. (Transport Personnel) cars were already following each other down

the highway, and coming to a standstill at the bottom of the village. Isabelle had only just come in from a long walk, and was rather tired, but she hurried out to where the cars were beginning to discharge their loads. It took time for the first two or three men to disengage themselves from the crowded car, and one had to help another to alight, for they were so stiff they could hardly move. They had been cramped together for some hours, and being very tired and no longer young, it was not surprising that they did not scramble out like boys on a holiday. But this was a holiday for them, and their first since November, 1914. For over nineteen months they had been within sound of the guns—never in the front lines, it is true, being a territorial regiment (the 34th Territorial), but always just behind the lines, either making roads or trenches, or serving as fatigue parties for the fighting regiments. French territorials, who are men round about the age of forty to forty-seven, are less exposed than the younger men, for they never go "over the top" to the assault; but their work is very arduous and tiring, and in spite of its value is less recognized. The men of this particular regiment all reiterated the same grievance—they had been forgotten, passed over when their turn came for a rest. Even now the "permission" of four days had not yet been given to the whole regiment, so that some had not seen their wives and families since the beginning of the war. As a rule, all territorials are *pères de famille.*

As soon as they had stretched their legs a bit most began to eat, drawing out of their haversack a hunch of stale bread and a piece of sausage; but some immediately went into the houses and demanded some-

thing more appetizing and ordered drinks. They had piled their rifles, and thrown their packs down against the wall, and now as they ate, questioned each other as to their movements in the near future. When they were really convinced that they were to stay there and not to be sent off again the next day, they turned to Isabelle and inquired the name of the village, its size and resources, and so on. Isabelle could not give them much precise information, but mentioned that the country was lovely, and that the woods all round were exquisite and full of lilies of the valley. They answered ironically that it was not scenery nor flowers for which their souls craved, but the wherewithal to get their stomachs and livers into order again —fresh meat, fresh vegetables, wine which was not sour, also a little society to remind them that family life was not extinct, even though it was not yet for them.

Another group of these rugged, lined, war-worn toilers to whom she talked, told her she was the first civilian they had seen for months. They examined her with interest from head to foot, and one could see at once that the critical sense for harmony of colour and form which is innate in all Frenchmen had not been dulled by life at the front. Isabelle was wearing the ordinary short full skirt, with high felt-topped boots and small high hat which were just then the fashion in Paris. They made no remarks, and she was uncertain if they approved or not. At all events, they enjoyed chatting to a woman and being asked questions. Though fate had not treated them well, they still considered themselves lucky, for, in supplying the needs of the first lines, they realized the terrible experiences the men there had to endure. They described how they took up food to these fore-

most trenches and left it within easy reach of the poilus, and how over and over again they had found it scarcely touched on their next visit. For men like this in very great danger and excitement sometimes cannot eat, even when food is at hand. Units were sometimes cut off from their supplies by curtain fire, and when parties of the 34th Territorials had finally got through at great risk, water was all the men were asking for.

In their wake, Isabelle met next day a long procession of carts coming towards Ance which, just before reaching it, turned off into the beech-wood outside the village. It was the " Intendance " (which answers to the English Army Service Corps) of the 34th Territorials. Isabelle wished to photograph that long line of carts, which covered the winding road as far as one could see. The men in the nearest cart drew up obligingly to facilitate her operations, and to her dismay she found she was thus stopping the whole convoy. She was terrified lest an officer should come along to see the cause of the delay, and though the men were in no way impatient at it, and joked her in rough though kindly fashion, she retired as quickly as possible.

Later on, when they had settled down in this wood, she often used to go and chat with them. They complained they were too far from the village, but as a matter of fact, so long as the weather was fine, they were much better off with a roof of green beeches and a carpet of lilies of the valley than their fellows who were housed by twenties and thirties in barns and outhouses.

Once at rest and out of danger, they began to sigh for their homes and families. They were all men over

forty, and to be uprooted at that age is a very great hardship.

Towards the end of April, de Gaurival's lorry was in full working order once more, and he knew he must start driving again any day. This would mean long hours of separation, and, moreover, just at a time when, in other respects, their life began to be more difficult.

From the first, the *patronne* of the hotel had declared that she could not serve their meals upstairs. She wanted them to have them with the other motor-drivers, for whose *popote* she had reserved a room since their arrival in February. Both de Gaurival and Isabelle were anxious to avoid such an arrangement, and by hook or crook they had managed during the first weeks to have their meals apart, sometimes in a small room with a large window at the back of the hotel, sometimes in one of their bedrooms. It had needed cajolery, persuasion, and bribes to obtain even this much. On the last day of April they came back from a walk hungry and tired. They found the whole hotel upset because some staff officers were dining there on their way through the village. The *patronne* had given them the motor-drivers' dining-room and put her usual customers in an ante-room. As soon as she caught sight of de Gaurival, she told him they must dine with the drivers or not at all. There had often been these little passages of arms before, but de Gaurival with his usual tact and skill had managed to calm her and arrange things. On this particular occasion, however, the *patronne* had lost one of her servant-girls, and was so put out and worried that she would listen to no argument. There was no help for it, and they decided to face de Gaurival's

comrades. Isabelle would have preferred to go without dinner at all, but de Gaurival refused to leave her alone supperless while he went and dined. She hoped that they would at least have a small table to themselves, but she found that there was only one common table, and that the men sitting round it were already appallingly crowded. They all got up and bowed as she came in, and two more chairs were somehow squeezed in. The men were silent at first, embarrassed by their presence, but soon began to talk again, and Isabelle heard some amusing stories. From their conversation she recognized several drivers whom de Gaurival had described to her: the actor; the agent for Dewar's Whisky, who spoke English; the business man of Barcelona and Perpignan; the man also who emanated from the hotel at Monte Carlo. They were all about forty or over; except the actor, none were young. Most of them were of good education, and all were polite and kindly. After dinner Isabelle joined in a game of bridge.

The evening outwardly passed off well, and Isabelle, while playing, lost all self-conscious feelings and forgot how and why she was there. But when she had taken her leave of them and reached her bedroom, she suddenly burst into a flood of tears. De Gaurival on joining her found her inconsolable. He was utterly bewildered at first, but asked no questions, and with a little reflection began to understand how she felt. He himself had been vexed and irritated at what had happened. Now he found that his usual power over her, whether to soothe and calm, excite or anger her was, for a time, unavailing. Why had they shown themselves in public? It was not the danger that they minded, or the fear of exposure. But their secret

had been sacred to them, and they had unveiled it. They felt, without being able to analyze the sentiment, that they had lowered and profaned the ties which bound them. Nevertheless, there were perforce several repetitions of this evening within the next few days, and though such a life became detestable to them, de Gaurival could not make up his mind to send Isabelle back to Paris.

The decision was forced on them, however, by another event. One morning, when Isabelle was still in bed, the *patronne* knocked at the door to say that she must have hers and de Gaurival's bedrooms immediately. General Balfourier was arriving at the hotel with all his staff in an hour, and all her bedrooms had been requisitioned.

There had often been alarms of this sort before, but the *patronne* had managed in one way or another to silence the demands made upon her by finding rooms elsewhere, or by pretending that all her bedrooms were already occupied by officers. In these villages of the war zone, all rooms can be requisitioned by the mayor in hotels and private houses, excepting the one occupied by the owner. To one officer who had threatened to complain to the mayor because she refused to turn out a motor-driver to make room for him, she had pertly rejoined: "I share my room with him. I don't mind sleeping with him, but I refuse to sleep with you!"

This time, however, there was no chance of excuse or subterfuge, and for such important personages she feared an inquiry if she could not satisfy their demands. De Gaurival found it useless to argue with her. And so in the end Isabelle and he, after discussing the situation quietly, and clinging desperately first to one

plan and then to another, had finally to abandon them all and decide on separation.

Of course, it might happen that these officers would refuse to turn a lady out of her room; but on the other hand, they might ask questions as to who she was, what she was doing, whom she was with, and then de Gaurival would be punished.

Isabelle therefore packed hurriedly, and an hour or two later she was making her way down the lorry-lined street between groups of soldiers. De Gaurival caught her up outside the village, and they continued their walk together. They did their best not to dwell on this cruel separation, but tried to talk gaily of de Gaurival's next leave, which he meant to spend in Paris.

CHAPTER XIII

A LEAVE IN PARIS

ISABELLE was having breakfast in bed one morning when an express message was brought to her. It was from de Gaurival. He told her that he had arrived in Paris the previous evening, that he had slept at the Hôtel de Calais, and was waiting in for her till ten o'clock in the hopes that she could join him there.

In Paris! He was in Paris! Isabelle's heart thumped as she sprang out of bed and began to dress. She had understood that he could not get his leave before the second half of May. Had he known all along and intended to take her by surprise, or had he been unable to warn her beforehand? She suddenly remembered that she had nothing fit to wear for the occasion; the clothes she had ordered purposely for her lover's arrival were not yet home from the costumier. It was too annoying! On this lovely spring day she would have to put on her old grey coat and skirt which she had been wearing all the winter. He would look her down with a shrug of his shoulders—she knew that in reality it made little difference to him, that it was a mere pose, but she would have been able to force a compliment from him if her costume had been there.

Then she began to wonder why had he not telephoned to her last night immediately on his arrival? How

stupid to have missed already so many hours of each other's society! But she remembered that of course he would have thought from her letters that her sister was still in Paris with her, and would have considered it risky. Her sister had, however, left Paris two days earlier than she had intended. It really was a great piece of luck! Isabelle wondered how she would have managed on this morning if the family had still been there. Was it true that a "Dieu des amoureux" existed, as de Gaurival always said?

She wondered if de Gaurival had gone straight from the station to the hotel and bed. Suddenly her heart stood still. What if he had come to the Rue du Bouclier last night to have a look round, and hoping perhaps to find her returning home late. She remembered how often he had wandered about below her windows in Algiers either to catch a glimpse of her or find out what she was doing. There he had known how every second of her day was employed. Suppose he had been there on the watch last night! If so, he might have seen her return with Ford! Ford had given her a lift home in his car, as they had been dining with mutual friends the evening before. She had hated to be alone with him even for five minutes, and had always avoided it, but in this case she would have upset everyone's arrangements and appeared ridiculous if she had not accepted his offer. What would Gauri think if he had seen them? She snatched up the little blue letter and read it again and again. She felt reassured. There was no indication that anything was wrong. She knew that if he meant to retaliate he was capable of playing with her as a cat plays with a mouse. But even then he would write some indefinite word or sentence to make her wonder

and tremble. There was nothing; the note was straightforward and concise. Reassured, she put it down again and continued her toilet. Her conscience was clear. De Gaurival was jealous of Ford, she knew, but all the same she could not always avoid him, and why should she break with a friend who was a perfect gentleman and from whom she had received nothing but kindness and consideration ?

Another and more serious matter now crossed her mind. She remembered suddenly that she had promised to spend the week-end at Versailles with his mother, Mrs. Patrick Ford. It was an engagement which could not be broken, for she and her son were returning to England the following week. They were to look up her family as soon as they arrived, give them news of her, and settle up several business matters for her. It was impossible to postpone such a long-arranged visit. But what would her lover say when he heard of it ? She felt inclined to sit down and cry, for, whichever way she arranged it, complications seemed inevitable.

It was therefore with less enthusiasm than she had ever felt that she went this time to meet her lover.

Their meeting was tender and affectionate. For once de Gaurival gave full rein to his eagerness, and he did not hide under a hard, almost brutal manner the hunger of his eyes to see her, of his ears to hear her, of his hands to touch her. Even little bursts of tender words and endearing expressions escaped him.

Isabelle had decided to inform him of her projected week-end visit at once, but in view of his present mood she had not the heart to mention it, and put off the evil time.

They spent the morning shopping, and lunched in the Bois de Boulogne. The Bois was in all the splendour of spring. Not a grain of dust had yet tarnished the glorious fresh green of the grass and trees. Every winding avenue with its canopy of leaves gave them the desire to explore it. Each such path must surely lead to an earthly paradise!—it seemed a desecration to remember in what a limited space they were all laid out. They wandered round the lakes; no water had ever seemed to them so transparent, or to mirror the green trees and flower-beds to such perfection. For years and years afterwards the Bois was always associated in both their minds with the sensations of delight that they experienced during that first day of de Gaurival's leave. In the evening they went to the theatre—the first theatre they had ever been to together. It was always a delight, but had lately become a novelty, to do something together which they had never done before.

When they reached their room in the hotel Gauri put his arm round Isabelle and led her into the bathroom. He turned on all the lights and said, pointing to the white porcelain bath: "Look." Then he turned on the taps. "Feel! Hot!—cold!" Then he pointed to the log fire that was burning in the dressing-room. "Warmth!" Back in the bedroom he pointed to the electric lights, and demonstrated how they could be turned on separately or all together.

Isabelle was astonished and amused at this bit of childish acting, but she said nothing. "You can't understand," he said. "My child, you can't possibly understand what all these adjuncts of civilization mean to a man who has been living in primitive simplicity, not to say barbarity, for over six months."

" It means so much to you because you are a sybarite born."

" Heaven knows I shall become one when this war is over! And I mean to enjoy all I can during this next week."

The next morning, de Gaurival, moving quietly so as not to wake Isabelle, stepped from the room, locking the door behind him.

When he returned it was lunch-time, but Isabelle was not quite dressed.

" Gauri—you locked me in !"

" Well, it was a choice of waking you so that you might lock the door after me, or of my locking it from the outside; and I supposed you would prefer the latter."

" Certainly; but I don't see that it was necessary."

" I hope you would never sleep in an hotel with the door unlocked."

" Well, it was fortunate I felt certain that it was you who had done it, and did not call out for anyone !"

De Gaurival had been out to look at a flat in the Avenue Victor Hugo, about which he had already been in correspondence. It had satisfied him, and he now took Isabelle there without delay.

She was delighted with it. She had never seen a flat so handsomely furnished, so large, so light and airy, and so comfortable.

" But, Gauri, after ten days here—how will you ever stand the front again ?"

" It isn't worth while to be uncomfortable when it isn't necessary. We are much more private here than in an hotel. There is nobody below us, and I do not think there is anybody above either."

For three days life was perfect for both of them.

Their surroundings seemed ideal, the weather also, and their moods, their wishes, and their desires were attuned in absolute harmony. This *entente* was too near perfection not to bring moments of anguish. Oh ! why were they not man and wife ? Why should not they be able to look forward to such times as this during a long lifetime, till they were old—quite, quite old ? What folly that every touch, every glance should contain a whole world of feeling because it might be the last ! Each knew the other's thoughts, but neither gave expression to them.

On the third day Isabelle mentioned her engagement to go to Versailles on the following Sunday. Since his arrival she had changed her week-end into a visit for the day only.

De Gaurival only said: " Ford again, then ?"

" Not Ford—Mrs. Ford, which is very different. She is a haughty, aristocratic, and autocratic old lady. She has asked me twice before, and I have not been able to manage the visit. This is the third and certainly the last time she will invite me, as she is going over to England next week. She has promised to look after some War Loan business for me, and I must explain things to her."

" Or to the son !"

" Yes, if she can't understand."

" Well, I have to go over to Bois-Colombes on Sunday, so that is all right."

Isabelle was very relieved that he had taken it so well and calmly.

" I shall be back to dinner, shall you ?"

" Yes."

The visit was not again mentioned, and early on Sunday morning Isabelle left the flat. De Gaurival

pretended to be reading the paper as she went off, but the moment she had disappeared he got up and strode about the flat. He looked at every article belonging to her—her gloves lying on a table, a book on the bed, shoes thrown in a corner of the room. For a long time he gazed down at the brushes and silver-topped bottles on the dressing-table, then at a writing-pad. He touched nothing. What were his feelings? Were those trifles associated in his mind with pleasure or pain? It was late when he started for Bois-Colombes, where he was to spend the day with relations. On his return to the flat at eight o'clock he hoped to find Isabelle already there. He went from room to room, turning up the lights and looking into every corner as if the force of his wishes must conjure up her presence. There was a cold meal on the table. He ate a little, but soon began his wanderings again. Every five seconds he glanced at his wrist-watch, then stopped to listen towards the door or to glance out of the window into the dark street.

"She won't come back to-night; perhaps she won't come back at all! If she isn't here soon she won't come at all, and I shall know the worst has happened!" Towards nine o'clock he heard the sound of a latch-key. Taking a swift look at himself in the glass, he twisted his moustache, smoothed his hair with his hands, and sat down quickly, throwing himself into a nonchalant attitude.

"Gauri, here I am!" Isabelle came quickly to his side.

"So I see."

"Say you're glad to see me! We have been fifteen hours apart."

"And whose fault is that?"

"Well, that bothering old visit is over now. I did not enjoy it a bit. I never was so stupid in my life, and I was so thankful to get away."

"You did not find Mr. Ford such delightful company as usual?"

"No, I appreciate him as a business man, but he was not interesting to-day. Listen, Gauri; this is the first time I've ever done anything you disapproved of since I left you in Algiers, but it was necessary. Don't let us talk of it any more. It was impossible to refuse this invitation again."

"Oh, I knew something like this would happen one day!"

"Gauri, do be sensible! What have you got in your head now? Don't let's quarrel. I have missed you so all this long day. You are all in all to me—more than ever before—perhaps more than at the beginning, if that were possible. I don't believe any woman could feel more than what you have made me feel. Don't be unkind to me. Don't let us talk about that any more; don't let us waste any more time!" Isabelle leant forward in her chair as she said the last words, touched his knee, and looked up into his face. But de Gaurival pushed her back.

"Wait a moment! I have a few questions to ask you first. You know now, I suppose, why Ford wanted you so much to-day?"

"No, I don't! You think he flirted with me! His manner has always been absolutely correct, and it was so while I was there to-day. As he was going to England it was necessary to see me about some business matters."

"Ten minutes at the station could have arranged that."

"Let me tell you, anyhow, he is not a bit taken

with me personally. After spending a whole day in his house I could not fail to find it out, could I, if there was the least suspicion of truth in what you profess to believe? He never even attempted to be attractive, much less to flirt. That is the truth, Gauri, the absolute truth. You do believe me, don't you?"

De Gaurival leant back in his chair and, looking up and down towards the ceiling and floor, said in a low, concentrated voice:

"Some women never have a lover, some have several, it is extremely rare to find a woman who has only one."

"I can see you will never trust me. I don't try to make you. Only time will show."

"Who else was there?"

"Mrs. Barton, Miss Charters and her father, and Mr. Franklin. They were all my superiors in brains and in wealth, and they talked over my head. I was like a fish out of water. Can't we leave them alone now?"

"Very well. Go into my room. I've something to show you in there."

Isabelle got up and went towards the door, but instead of opening it she put up her arm against it, and leant her head on it in an attitude of complete abandonment.

As soon as she had turned away de Gaurival picked up her little handbag and emptied its contents on to the table. "What is this?"

Isabelle turned round quickly, startled by the sudden exclamation. The blood rushed to her face with indignation as she saw what he was doing, but she controlled herself and said quietly:

"You might at least ask to see my correspondence instead of taking it! I always show you whatever you want."

"What is this telephone number?"

"Nothing to do with Ford."

"Ah! here is his letter asking you to go down there, and beginning 'Dear Friend.' This is most interesting! Then you lied to me just now when you said that he took no interest in you personally."

"For Heaven's sake, Gauri, leave off talking about Ford. Nothing whatever passed between us the whole day, not a word, not a glance. I've even a proof of what I say. He promised to drive me back this evening. At the last moment he made some excuse about petrol, and I had to take the train. That was why I was late."

"Oh, he refused to drive you back?"

"Yes, it was so flagrantly an excuse, a pretext, that I was fearfully hurt and offended."

"Why did you not tell me that before?"

"Oh, I came back hoping to forget all about the horrid incident. I thought we were going to have a nice evening together, and instead of that you worry my life out. Do be kind to me! I need you so much just now. It has often been you who were in need of me, but now it is I who need you. This visit was a fiasco. From the moment I arrived I counted the hours and minutes to the time I could get back again. I even made up my mind that I would never, under any circumstances, do anything you disapproved of again! I will be sweet and good for ever if you will never mention the visit again."

"And so he did not bring you back," said de Gaurival again musingly. Then the thought crossed

his mind: "She has offended him. There is another man in this! I must and will find out all." Then he repeated suddenly: "What is this telephone number?"

"I really forget." Then, getting up resolutely, she said: "Gauri, I am going to bed. My mind and brain won't stand this cross-questioning any longer. I came back here eagerly, thinking you wanted me, and I certainly wanted you. But I am not going to stand being tortured like this about nothing. I'm going to bed. Good-night."

"Not so fast!"

"It is no use! I've had a long and worrying day and I'm tired. Good-night. *À demain.*"

"Sit down!" He said it so sternly that she obeyed. "Whose telephone number is that?"

"I don't know."

"You *lie.*" De Gaurival pushed her back in her chair and bent down over her, his face close to hers. "Answer."

"Let me see the writing."

"Answer."

"Let me see the writing. Let me sit up, and if I know I will tell you. I swear it."

"Answer."

"Gauri, you are hurting me, let me sit up. You frighten me!"

"Answer."

Isabelle, using all her strength, tried to push him away, but he only pinioned her tighter and she gave up the struggle.

"Answer."

"Mr. Franklin."

De Gaurival let go of her and sat down opposite. "Why did he give it you?"

" Because he wanted me to ring him up during the week to say if I was free next Sunday."

" What for ?"

" He was astounded that I had not seen the Trianons and offered to show me them one day. I said I was engaged that day. He proposed another, but I did not mean to go, and in order that he should not press me further, I said I would telephone to him."

" You are going to telephone to him now."

" Not at this time of night ! Don't be so ridiculous !"

" I am going to ring him up, and you are going to speak to him."

" No, Gauri. It would put me in a totally wrong position."

" Do you hear me ?"

" Well, wait till to-morrow, and then I promise to. I hate to give him a misleading impression of myself by ringing him up the moment I've left him."

" I have got to know now."

" Know what ?"

" Several little things that have been puzzling me."

" I see. You are going to cross-question me about Franklin as you have about Ford. Well, I have had enough ! I'm sick of you ! I'm sick of you ! I'm going."

" If you leave this room you never enter it again !"

" Gauri !"

De Gaurival went over to the telephone, rang up Franklin's valet, and told him that a lady wished to speak to his master. Then turning round to Isabelle, he told her to come.

" No, speak to him yourself."

He put down the receiver, took her by the wrist,

and with a threatening whisper dragged her towards the telephone. He gave her one receiver and took up the other.

" He's there, speak."

Isabelle, trying to put her wits together, said:

" Is that you, Mr. Franklin ? I just telephoned to say I got home all right. Also, I found letters which will force me to leave Paris for a short time. I'm afraid then our plans for the Trianons are off."

The voice came back;

" Oh, I'm so sorry. I hope you have not had bad news." Isabelle muttered a negative.

" Well, we must arrange it for when you come back. Our talk together this afternoon will be a very precious memory to me. We *must* meet again. I am going to write to you."

" Very well. Good-night."

" Good-night."

Isabelle hung up the receiver and turned to de Gaurival, whose face was buried in his hands. When she saw his attitude, she longed to throw her arms around him and comfort him for this terrible blow. But her instinct told her she must brave it out, and she said:

" You think I flirted with this man ?"

" His answer is a proof of an outrageous flirtation."

" Just as you like !"

" You deny it ? You show some pluck; but neither pluck nor anything else can save you now."

" Save me !—from what ?"

" You shall see."

" I am tired. May I go to bed now ?"

" You want to egg me on to beat you, torture you,

or kill you; but I shall do nothing of the sort. You either leave this room never to return or you make a clean breast of all that happened to-day. I have never threatened you before, but you know as well as I do that I shall adhere to what I say."

"What do you want to know?"

"Did you flirt with this man?"

"No."

"You lie."

"Have I ever lied to you?"

"I've never found you out yet, but I will this time. Unless you tell me exactly what happened, I will never see you again!"

"And if I do?"

"Then I will see."

"Well, here's the truth. I met this man for the first time to-day. He *did*, it is true, single me out and interest himself in me. He sat by me at lunch, and perhaps I paid too much attention to him, but that was because I wished to avoid talking to Ford. You had made me so nervous about Ford that it never entered my head that I must be on my guard against any other man. Then after lunch, when we were all sitting in the garden, I continued laughing and joking with Franklin. He accompanied me when I went to pick some roses, and when I was alone with him I realized for the first time that he was trying to flirt." De Gaurival made an exclamation of deep disgust. "I joined the party on the lawn again immediately, but probably Ford guessed something was up between us, for he treated me very badly."

"Naturally he did not like to see another stepping in before him!"

"If I had not been so preoccupied about Ford, no

other man could possibly have attempted to say a word to me that the whole universe might not hear."

"So the whole thing was my fault?"

"Yes, really, a little."

"And you show no shame! Don't you realize what you have done? Are you as lacking in brain as in modesty?"

"I was very hurt, but it was better to pretend that I noticed nothing than to show anger. But anyhow, I gave him completely to understand by my manner that I was not to be flirted with!"

"All that is nothing! You go directly from my arms here, from me who give you daily proof of a passion of which the ordinary man is not even capable, to laugh, flirt, and talk with any adventurer who happens to come along. You have behaved like some silly girl who does not know what life is. Had you been attracted by this man, had he been young and mad with passion, had you even premeditated this for the sake of money or ambition, I could have found more excuse for you."

"Money and ambition! I don't know what you mean! Nothing happened! Nothing at all! You won't understand! It was absolutely nothing! I stopped him dead when I saw what was coming."

"If this goes on when I am here, what must it be like when I am at the front?"

"Gauri, let me explain."

"Explain? What explanation can you offer? There is none to give! Don't you understand there are very few men on this earth who can love as passionately as I? And you want to exchange that for a vulgar flirtation! But it is only when experiences

such as you have just had have been multiplied indefinitely that you will realize what I was and could have been to you."

"What *are* you talking about? I had no experience, as you call it. While I am yours, nothing could happen to me."

"I don't know if you really think that, and I don't care."

"Listen, Gauri! When we first knew each other I had a husband. You used to see me boxed up with him every night, and I used to suffer on your behalf for the pain I thought it must give you. Yet the next day you were as ready to see me as if I belonged to you and you only. You were willing, then, to lead this life when any day he might have won me back from you, and yet you feel yourself now humiliated just because this man was or appeared to be a little attracted? Do you think I care the very least for Franklin? Do you think I want to see him again?"

"There can be no comparison between your husband and this man."

"What! this little trivial incident hurts you more than my former everyday intimacy with my husband!"

"Of course it does. Don't you see it yourself, or are you voluntarily blind? Don't you see that such an incident, trivial as you call it, shatters our idyll? Don't you see that you lower irrevocably all that is glorious and splendid in our passion? Don't you see that it makes you no longer a woman apart for me?—that it changes everything?"

Isabelle answered with greater earnestness than ever, and more slowly and calmly: "I only see *this*, Gauri, that this talk has shown me your character more clearly than ever, that I have learnt more in this hour

than ever before. Forget what I have told you; there is nothing to forgive."

"How can I forget? You would like to see me playing the part of the jealous husband, but it is a rôle which does not please me."

"Then there is no more to be said."

"Why did you tell me? Could not you keep your secret?"

"There was no secret, and you wanted the truth. It was so harmless, how could I guess it would hurt you so?"

"Can't you imagine the visions I shall now have when I get back to the front? What am I to expect from your conduct when I am far away, when I know what can happen when I am here?"

"I will make you forget. It was all nothing! You can easily forget if you allow yourself to. I have learnt my lesson. I will make up to you a thousand-fold. I love you, Gauri. I will blot out this day, and I will be the same woman to you as before, only much, much more. I love you. You are all in all to me. I wish I had not left you to-day. You shall never plead with me again for anything on earth. It was nothing!—a trifle of no importance!"

"No importance to you!"

"Don't say anything more. You have made me suffer enough. I don't mind for myself, but I hate the thought that you punish yourself still more in punishing me. I don't want you to be punished for my fault. I love you." Isabelle flung herself down on her knees beside him as she said the last words.

De Gaurival pushed her back.

"Go away."

"Very well, then." Isabelle got up deliberately, collected all her things and went towards the door. She felt that if he let her go out at that moment she could never forgive him.

"Come here, Isabelle." All her life, she thought to herself, she would be grateful for those words.

She ran to him. "You understand, you understand at last, Gauri!"

"I understand that probably all women are alike!"

"I am not a saint on earth. But there was nothing that happened to me to-day which might not have happened to a saint. I had not the shadow of an unloyal thought."

"Isabelle! Isabelle!" He took her in his arms.

"Listen, Gauri. Try not to be so hard on me. You force yourself to be hard when your heart impels you to be gentle and loving, and then on a day like this, when you are really hurt, with cause or without, you do not know how to stand it. I do not mind your severity for myself, but I mind it for you. I can't bear to feel that you are always restraining yourself for fear you might be too sweet and kind to me."

"Ah, you would like me to be at your feet again, imploring from you a word, a letter, a tender glance! You could then crush me beneath your foot as you did once before. But I know you, my lady, and you shall never have the chance again!"

"If, as you say, I treated you badly once, it could not happen again, because I understand you better. I would be very grateful now if you would *show* more love. It is there, I know, and it needs no words to prove it; but I would like again to bask in a flood of *tendresses* such as you used to shower upon me so freely."

"No, chère madame, never! You would immediately put it down to weakness or effeminacy, and you would despise me and make me suffer."

"It is not true, Gauri. I would be only grateful now."

"It is you who have given me the weapons by which alone I hold you. You know that."

"What weapons? I don't understand what you mean."

"If ever I gave way to you, if ever I asked you for mercy or for pity, I should lose you."

"That is why you don't ask my pardon to-day, then?"

"Ask your pardon?" De Gaurival hardly knew whether to laugh or to be indignant. "Ask *your* pardon? But supposing it came to that, or if I had to beg you for anything, all would be over between us."

"Why? I don't see why. Well, remain as you are, Gauri. I don't mind. I don't want you to change. Be hard if you must. I only want to belong to you."

Isabelle had nestled gradually right into his arms, and now she gave a gentle sigh and closed her eyes. They did not speak for a few minutes, and de Gaurival looked at her more closely. Surely!—yes—it was true, she had gone to sleep—gone to sleep in his arms.

"Isabelle."

She did not answer. After all that terrible discussion, she had put her head on his shoulder and found rest and peace there. His eyes became blurred as he looked down on her, and he drew her closer to him. She made a little movement, and he hurriedly brushed his hand across his eyes and his expression changed to its former sternness. But she did not wake, and well into the night he held her thus.

The last two days of his leave were quiet and calm. The events of Sunday had made them a little self-conscious and on their guard, but the approaching separation filled them with such anguish that, though they did not talk of it, they thought of nothing else.

At the station barrier at the last day Isabelle found herself amidst a group of women, some weeping, some silent and constrained, some trying to smile and laugh. The military train seemed already crowded, but more and more soldiers clambered into it. De Gaurival had provided himself with a second-class ticket, but it appeared likely he would nevertheless have to travel in one of the overcrowded thirds.

Isabelle with other women climbed on a trolly from which it was possible to obtain a view of the platform. "Voilà le mien, celui avec le casque," said a woman beside her, and pointed into the crowd. "Le mien ne me regarde pas, il ne veut pas tourner," said another. "Le voilà le mien qui revient," cried a third, much excited. They were all of the working classes. There was one poor wife who could not persuade her husband to go through the barrier. He was a little tipsy, and he kept saying: "Mais viens donc, viens un peu plus loin." The military police barred the way to her, and she could not make him leave her. She was in great anxiety lest he should miss the train, and be punished for arriving back late. "Mais va donc; make sure of your place in the train and come back, I'll wait for you here." She knew if once he got beyond the barrier he could not come back. At last a kind comrade took him by the arm and dragged him unwillingly towards the train. Tears were running down Isabelle's cheeks. She did not know if it was for herself she was crying or for

all these little private dramas being played in public around her.

De Gaurival waved. She thought he would not like her to be waiting there indefinitely, so she waved back, jumped down from the trolly and left the station.

CHAPTER XIV

TOWARDS THE SOMME AND A FUTILE JOURNEY

THE very next day after de Gaurival's departure Isabelle began to make preparations for her journey to England. It never entered her head that there could be any possibility of her returning to Ance, for during the whole of his leave, when speaking of his detachment, he had always referred to its departure, and used to make surmises as to where its destination might be. When he left Paris he was not even certain of finding it still in Ance. Isabelle's one idea was, therefore, to get to England as soon as possible, so as to be in France again when the chance of her being able to join him would be greater.

She kept him informed of her plans, and in his first two or three letters he referred to the journey she was about to take, and to her preparations for departure, and apparently agreed with all her arrangements. Her dismay and agitation were great, therefore, when on the very morning she was to start she received the following letter:

"ANCE,
"*June* 2, 1916.

"I received this morning the little wrist-watch. It is of course a woman's watch, but it does not please me any the less for that. It goes well, and thank you very much for lending it me till I receive my own. By the way, one detail—the bracelet is so narrow that

I cannot slip the watch on to my wrist, but this is of little or no importance.

"Your letters have all reached me safely. They give the idea that you are not in so great a hurry now to join your family.

"My detachment is still resting here, and though we are doing absolutely nothing, it appears now that we are to remain here in case we should be needed. We do not complain, and I laze all day in my room and in the woods. Of course such a state of affairs may not last. While it does, I make the most of it. If you change your mind about going to England, you know the way here and I shall be pleased to see you.

"My brother Charles has been in the first line at Verdun for the last ten days. I am told by the chasseurs who are resting here about the terrible number of casualties caused by the heavy artillery without any infantry attack on our part, and I am anxious. Why do they delay to send to Verdun, if only for one week, a few hundreds of the five million English who have been mobilized? If you mean to come, write quickly."

Isabelle received this letter at lunch-time, and her train was due to leave the Gare St. Lazare at four. All her luggage was ready, her passport, after many difficulties, signed for departure on that particular day. Her parents had been needing her for some time past and were now expecting her.

No, it was too late now to change her plans, she must go through with them. She need not stay more than a fortnight in Liverpool, but she could not again put off her return.

Terribly disappointed herself, miserable that de

Gaurival might feel she was deserting him, fearing his anger and indignation though she knew he would not give vent to it, she started off with aching heart.

On arriving in Liverpool she wrote letters explaining matters, letters of love, letters begging for news; but no answer came. It was as she had feared, and she tried to throw herself into her family life and forget that any mail from France existed.

She continued to write to him, however, and promised to be ready to return the very day he said there was any possibility of her joining him.

At last, after six weeks—during all that time she had only received a card from Sermaize, and one from Senlis, which showed her his group had left Ance and was probably in the Somme area—she received two letters.

"MORENVILLERS,
"*July* 10.

"I received your letters safely and thank you for them. I have had little leisure for writing during these last weeks. On June 20 our motor group suddenly left Ance for Sermaize-les-Bains, that poor little martyred town which is now only a mass of bricks heaped up on either side of the roads. The residents have returned and are living in wooden huts. What a sad and curious vision of war Sermaize presents!

"After that came the important departure from the Meuse to the Somme. The hundred lorries of our group did the journey in three stages of about one hundred kilometres each.

"We passed through La Chaussée, La Ferté Foucher, Vitry-le-François, Fère Champenoise, Suzanne, and Esternay, through which the avalanche of the Marne passed.

"At poor ruined Senlis I was able to sleep at the Hotel du Grand Cerf, which was for a time the headquarters of Von Kluck. The last stage of our journey from Senlis to Privennes was through the beautiful forest of Ermenonville. Privennes is a little village of three hundred inhabitants, where an aviation park is being established. We stayed there a week.

"Finally we came here to Saint Morenvillers in the Oise district, between Montdidier, Breteuil, and St. Just en Chaussée, and we have been here since the beginning of July.

"Our detachment supplies the front between Chaulny, Roye, and Lassigny. Our runs are not too trying. We start generally at four or five a.m., return in the evening, and as a rule only make the journey every other day.

"I managed to find a little room here, with a small bed and straw mattress; the window looks on to the open country, which could not be more beautiful than at present with its high wheat and oats. To tell you the truth, I am as happy and comfortable as in my big house in Algiers. I have only to remember the dug-outs in Wagermoulin and Laval to revel in the comfort of this little room.

"Our mess is provisioned here by the meat lorries, and we take it in turns to do the catering and see to the cooking. Last week was my week, and the meals did not suffer on that account!

"I spent a day lately in the curious town of Beauvais, forty kilometres from here. I went there on fatigue duty with my lorry. What a change it was to be in a big town again after the villages in which we have lived for so long! The busy traffic at a grocery store—a *nouvelle galerie*—the amount of goods

of all sorts exposed for sale in the windows took me by surprise, and I felt transported to a new world, so little have we been accustomed of late to such scenes.

"The guns opposite are thundering continually. There is every indication that our attack on the Somme will extend here to the south. And we await that event with impatience. The other day when we were in the station of Tricot we saw some of the new heavy artillery. Each armoured train was carrying two guns of 320. The Boches must be feeling their presence by now!

"Four kilometres from here, at Maigneley, there is a prisoners' camp. The prisoners are under canvas and guarded by barbed wire and cavalry. They are muddy, very muddy. Many are less than twenty years of age.

"My brother Charles is in the trenches at Verdun for the third time. He had the good luck to get off last time with a fragment of shrapnel on his helmet and one on his foot, though his regiment suffered heavily. The Boches once penetrated into the trench in which he was, but they did not get out again! He is quite hardened now, and accustomed to the constant dangers. He talks very differently from what he did when I saw him near Vitry, when he described his first two days at the front. He had then been in Champagne, near the famous Ravin de Marsan, where I too was once, and where so many Basques and Biarritzois lie buried.

"Poor Charles! thrown so mercilessly into this furnace—he who had never done any military service! He can well say now he is one of the Verdun army! If God wills that he return alive, we shall meet again at home. What a transformation the war has worked

in him! He was such a child! Even when in Spain he remained in leading strings, as you may say. How quickly, none the less, did he accustom himself to danger and this hard life! He wrote at first, and rightly, that to be under shell-fire at Verdun was like dying all the time by inches.

"I am glad to hear you have had a happy time in England with your family. I am always pleased to receive letters from you."

Isabelle was overjoyed at hearing from him once again, and at the tone of his letter, which seemed to show him gentler towards her than she had dared to hope.

She opened the other one.

"*Sunday, July* 13, 1916.

"I have just received your letter of the 18th, and likewise the preceding one. I am glad to hear that the bracelet-watch arrived back safely. In case you return to France soon, I write to tell you that you could come to St. Morenvillers. The nearest station is Baunes, two kilometres away, which is on the main line between Paris and Amiens. I know that it is quite easy, for the wife of one of my pals arrived this morning with a *laissez-passer* issued at Paris for St. Morenvillers.

"The country is pretty, and you would see things that would interest you. But perhaps you intend to stay with your family some time, and as far as that goes I cannot tell if we shall remain here much longer.

"If you come this way, do not hamper yourself with luggage, but bring only a handbag."

These letters had been forwarded to Isabelle from

Liverpool, for, a few days previously, she had gone to visit relations in Ireland.

The joy at hearing again from de Gaurival was followed by intense perplexity and agitation.

Why had he asked her to come? Why had he not written his usual sort of letter without any half invitation, which put her again in such a difficult position? She was so worried that for a moment she thought of breaking with this lover who banished all quiet and calm from her life. If she did not answer, if she did not go, the break would come of itself without a word on either side. She thought of his hardness, how he never forgave nor forgot anything which he might choose to consider a slight from any of his friends or acquaintances, and still less from her. If she failed him now, he would retaliate upon her even though he himself should suffer more by it than she. His pride was all the more terrible from its extreme sensitiveness, and she knew it well. She remembered that she had repeatedly said in her letters: "Tell me to come and I will take the first train possible," or words to that effect. But after waiting six weeks for the invitation, with no word from him, she had despaired of receiving it, and had arranged to spend the month of August in Ireland, leaving him out of her calculations. And now, just as she had made this long journey and was preparing to settle down for a little while, these letters arrived!

Why could not she write calmly and say: "I will come when I have finished this visit," and then meanwhile get what enjoyment out of it she could? But she knew she would have no peace of mind while he was waiting for her, and she at once gave up any idea of pleasure or amusement.

After twenty-four hours' reflection, she came to the conclusion she must stay a fortnight where she was, and she would then hurry to London, Paris, and St. Morenvillers as quickly as possible. She wrote to that effect, begging de Gaurival if his own plans changed before the middle of August to let her know. By force of circumstances, the fortnight was extended to three weeks, but at last Isabelle found herself free to go.

There was danger from submarines in the Irish Channel the week she wanted to cross, but she was too impatient and anxious to delay her journey. She had also business in London, but decided to neglect that so as to reach France as quickly as possible. Yet, was she not in all probability making this journey for nothing? De Gaurival had not written again since his two letters from St. Morenvillers; if he was angry with her, he perhaps would not let her come at the last moment. Suppose she should arrive at her Paris address and find no letter for her—no information as to what she was to do! If, however, she did not stick to her word, if she did not reach Paris by the date she had mentioned, then he would be justified in not forgiving her—indeed, he would even fall in her estimation if, knowing his character as she did, he treated lightly the breaking of her promise. She must go.

Isabelle's journey from London to Paris was fraught with many difficulties and fatigues. Travelling was very different in July, 1916, from the year before, when she had flown to him at Nancy.

She was worn out mentally and physically when at last she arrived one stifling evening at her sister's flat in Paris.

A maid had been left in charge, and as soon as the girl opened the door Isabelle asked if there were letters for her.

Yes! One was from de Gaurival.

"AUVILLERS,
"*August* 8, 1916.

"I have received your letters of August 4 and 5.

"We left St. Morenvillers on August 1, and have been camping here for over a week. I cannot have you here just now, as we are continually on our lorries and I have too little freedom. You should have come when I told you. Twice I wrote to you to come. Now it is too late, and I no longer desire it."

If the maid had not been watching her Isabelle would have broken down. But the obvious curiosity in the girl's dark eyes enabled her to pull herself together and go quietly to her room. There, in spite of her fatigue and the lateness of the hour, she wrote a hurried letter to de Gaurival, saying she was coming in two days' time in spite of what he had said, and that he must expect her; then she herself took the letter to the post. On her return to her room she read and reread the lines written in the centre of a single sheet of writing-paper. It was writing-paper that she had given him, and *this* was the use to which it had been put!

This detail alone sent the tears streaming down her cheeks. She fell asleep amidst her tears, and woke up determined to make a fight to reach him. Had she braved fatigue, inconvenience, even danger, to be stopped at the eleventh hour? Where was Auvillers? She looked out the place in the time-table, but it was not mentioned. Then she searched through a Bottin. She found the station was Baunes, the same as for

St. Morenvillers, and having read up a few details of the locality, in case of questions, she went to the Commissaire de Police for her "sauf-conduit." She waited an hour before being attended to. What a relief when she was once more in the street, out of that atmosphere of photographs, birth certificates, and identity cards, which was the necessary forerunner of her trip into the war zone! Oh, how she had hated answering the questions of the man at the desk about her age, her relations, and all her most personal concerns! Isabelle's turn for an interview had come between a woman with a huge basket of butter and eggs, who required a "sauf-conduit" to the town at which she wanted to sell them, and an English Red Cross ambulance driver, who had had a street accident, and was trying to explain in very bad French where she was born.

Another man was urging an official to legalize a document stating his Paris domicile. The argument got very heated indeed, and the people behind stared with astonishment at his daring to pit himself against such a brick wall as a French Police Commissaire.

Isabelle would have willingly helped the English girl by interpreting for her, but she was afraid that if she offered assistance unasked, she would soon find, in the complications of simultaneous questions and answers, that she herself had been in the car or in the smashed-up van, or had at least been crossing the road at the time. She therefore glided quickly into the street with her precious papers, and made purchases at a *pâtisserie*, a tobacconist's, and finally at a *libraire* for books and magazines. She knew how anything from Paris was prized by men in villages behind the lines.

She then hurried back laden with her numerous

parcels, wrote another note to de Gaurival's military address, which was a mixture of figures and capital letters, and prepared for departure. Determined to take only a bag, she found that she had not room for a second costume. Must she, therefore, put on her travelling costume and brown walking boots, or should she venture in her pretty clothes? She did not want de Gaurival to think she had forgotten how to dress while she had been in England. On the other hand, it was necessary to be as inconspicuous as possible. It might be impossible for them to go out together at all, unless she could pass for a resident in the village.

The next morning she caught her train quite comfortably. Her *laissez-passer* was examined, but no remark made. Just as the train started, she found to her annoyance that it did not stop at Baunes. She must therefore leave it at St. Just, and wait for a slow train on.

As she had over an hour to wait at St. Just, she followed the crowd into the little station, giving up her ticket at the door. As she stepped in, the door shut behind her, and she had an indescribable feeling that she had been trapped. Her instinct had not deceived her. She went to the *guichet* for a ticket to Baunes, and was asked for her *laissez-passer*. She showed it, and was told she must get it *viséd*. When she saw the French gendarme sitting at a table with an anxious crowd round him, she felt certain of her fate. She determined to go without a ticket, but found it impossible to get on to the platform again without one. There was nothing for it but to face the gendarme. She managed to get to his side pretty quickly, and presented her paper. "Chez qui allez-vous là-bas?" Isabelle mentioned a name. "Pour-

quoi ?" " C'est mon amie et je reste quelques jours chez elle." " Votre mari est par là ?" " Non, mon mari est en Amérique." " Mais votre motif n'est pas suffisant." Isabelle began to argue, but without avail. She was in desperation that the train would go off without her. At last, thinking that he really had suspicions about her honesty and that he was perhaps taking her for a spy, she gave a hint that she hoped to see a soldier relation in that neighbourhood. She had fallen into the trap cleverly laid for her. He seized upon a document, and read out the sentence about all visits to *militaires* being expressly forbidden. Isabelle said she was aware of that, and that that was not the object of her journey. But he had her in his grip now, and she knew she had lost the game. All the answer she could now get was: " Madame, je m'occuperai de vous plus tard." " Mais mon train va partir." He put her *laissez-passer* in the drawer of his table and shut it with a bang.

She went to get the bag she had left on the platform, but was not allowed on to fetch it. When, impatiently, she brushed past the ticket-collector, a soldier immediately placed himself in front of her with fixed bayonet.

She told him, with as much dignity as she could summon to her aid, she should distinctly prefer his fetching her bag to fetching it herself ! The train had gone meanwhile, and there was not another till four in the afternoon. After a while she determined to return to the charge, but found the gendarme or capitaine (she wished she had noticed his rank before, and had said " Mon Capitaine " at the end of each sentence) having the very same argument with a very flighty-looking young person, " Mais ce n'est pas mon

mari que je veux voir, voilà mon divorce," and she displayed a closely written document.

Isabelle listened for some time to the discussion, and if she had not been so disgusted with the failure of her own plans, she might have been amused. But the man was a true bully, and quite apart from " excès de zèle," he enjoyed tormenting his victims and refusing their appeals. Many women were crying. Isabelle gave up all idea of getting back her *laissez-passer*, and determined to go into town and try and find means of letting de Gaurival know that she could not get through.

She was stopped at the exit by a soldier, and asked for her *laissez-passer*. She said she was only going out for lunch, but he would not let her pass.

She returned to the gendarme's table and, apologizing for interrupting him in his examination of one of the tearful women, asked for permission to lunch in town. " Nous verrons plus tard." What ! was he going to keep her kicking her heels in this stifling little station all day ? Reflecting, however, that perhaps he had misunderstood her, she explained that she was hungry, that she had started very early on her journey, and that she would return to the station in time for her train to Paris. He replied that he believed her, but that as there were fifteen other women in the same position as herself, he could not let one out and not the others, and if he let all go, at least half would not return.

" But I have no interest in St. Just. I do not want to stay here. This is not my destination."

" I did not know the English were so obstinate !"

" But, mon Capitaine, it is a quality which you should rejoice to find, and which is serving your nation well at present !"

"That is true. I, unfortunately, am a Breton, and am endowed with a good deal of that quality myself."

"You cannot mean, surely, to deprive me of lunch?"

"Oh no, I will see that some is brought to the station by-and-by."

"You may be sure of my coming back if I leave my luggage here!" But he was not listening; he had already turned to hear another application.

Isabelle felt her blood begin to boil. She was much more angry and indignant at being prevented going out to lunch than when she found she could not continue her journey. *That* had some common sense, *this* none.

Should she plan an escape, or submit to her fate? She talked to the various soldiers who were guarding the exits. One, who was standing at the luggage exit, was so small that with a slight push she could have bowled him over, bayonet and all, and with a good start and a short skirt she could have defied any of them to catch her. But he was such a nice little soldier, and so sympathetic, that she did not want to get him into trouble. She found that they all had had more than enough of the captain's zeal.

Suddenly she perceived a lieutenant-colonel standing behind her talking to two officers. He must save her. He was rather short, rather stout, with rather pale, puffy cheeks and eye-glasses. When he had finished talking to the officers he began to converse with the capitaine. Her hopes began to rise as she saw they were not in complete agreement.

When they separated, she darted towards him, explained her predicament, and asked him to release her from her prison. At that moment her whole aim was to be out of the station, and she had almost

forgotten about de Gaurival. The colonel was most kind, and offered to drive her in his car into the town if she would promise to return to the station for the afternoon train to Paris. Isabelle immediately agreed. Two other women had noticed her manœuvre and had joined them. The colonel led them all three quickly to his car, and they crowded into it. The soldier chauffeur grinned openly when he asked where he was to take them. The women looked at their saviour gratefully. One of them was the flighty young divorcée and, in her anxiety to prove that she would not try to escape, she offered her divorce papers to the colonel to keep !

The car stopped at the entrance to the principal hotel, and here the colonel took his leave of them. Isabelle entered the restaurant, but was told that she could not lunch before twelve o'clock. It was true. It was not lunch-time yet, not even eleven o'clock ! and she felt she had been hours and hours in that wretched station, and that it was days since she had left Paris ! She walked up the main street of the village, and while examining a signpost was accosted by a soldier who, with a group of others, was standing near by. " You don't know this neighbourhood, mademoiselle ?" " No, which is the road to Baunes ?" They told her, and then she found they were burning with curiosity to know how she had got out of the station, and whom she had come to see. Isabelle was rather embarrassed to find that they all knew of her predicament, but they were kindly and good-natured, and, buried away in this inhospitable-looking village, it was natural they should welcome the slightest excitement.

A minute later another fine, good-looking young

soldier spoke to her: " Madame, puis-je vous demander un renseignement ? Où est la jeune femme qui est sortie avec le Colonel et vous ?" Isabelle told him that they had all been put down at the hotel, and she was probably there. " C'est ma dame." She told him to hurry and join her, as she probably had to leave by the afternoon train for Paris like herself. She felt glad that somebody at least had had good luck.

Standing in the street there was a lorry which the chauffeur was greasing and cleaning. She asked about the motor-car detachment to which de Gaurival belonged, but he could tell her nothing, as he never went in that direction. By this time Isabelle was out in the country, and her spirits rose again when she found herself walking along a good road between hedges and fields. She found it was only sixteen kilometres to Auvillers by the road, and felt quite capable of walking it. While she was considering it, a cyclist came along. Isabelle asked him if he was going that way, and if so, if he would take a note for her. He said he could manage it, though he was not going there direct. He then congratulated her on getting out of the station. He too ! Did everybody in the village know of her misfortunes ? He was very anxious that Isabelle should walk on, now that she had got so far, and could not understand that she meant to return to the lion's den again that afternoon. Isabelle pointed out that she had no luggage and no papers, and that whatever happened she did not want to bring trouble on her friends. She wished, all the same, he would offer to give her a lift on his mudguard, but he did not go so far as that in his desire to help her.

She turned back, went to the hotel for lunch, and

a quarter of an hour before the train was due to start, she returned to the station.

At least three soldiers said to her: "Oh! vous êtes revenue?" and she began to think she had been rather stupid to have come, till she found that the young divorcée had been brought back to the station by a gendarme. She was sitting at that moment near the capitaine on a small bench, evidently under observation.

Isabelle asked about the other women who had been stopped in the morning, and heard they had all returned to Paris by a still earlier train. The young woman in mourning whose handsome young husband had spoken to Isabelle in the street was sobbing bitterly. She had probably expected to stay some weeks with him, and a few hours of his society had only made the separation harder.

The train for Paris was announced, the station door opened, all papers were returned to their owners, and they were off. As Isabelle put her *laissez-passer* in her bag, some writing caught her eye. In the midst of her misfortunes she could not but smile, as she read, "Refoulée sur l'arrière," with the signature of the capitaine and the date. The words were so expressive and so exactly described the situation!

CHAPTER XV

AN ULTIMATUM AND A SECOND ATTEMPT

ISABELLE could not make up her mind whether to tell de Gaurival of her futile journey. Such a story ought to bring him to his knees at once; but if it did not, she, in her turn, could not forgive him, and the break between them would be irrevocable. She therefore told him nothing of it, but wrote that she was waiting to hear from him, asking where Auvillers was, and describing the two journeys from Ireland to England and from England to France that she had undertaken to come to him. She said she could not remain alone in Paris, and that if she did not hear from him during the next two or three days, she would go to friends in Havre.

No answer came back, and accordingly she started off for Havre. She was most unwilling to go there, but she felt bound to do as she had said, or he would not believe her word another time; also she hoped that, in choosing Havre as her destination, he would fear the ease with which she might cross back to England, and would be spurred in consequence to answer her letter more quickly.

She had no sooner arrived in Havre than she received a letter from him.

"AUVILLERS,
"*August* 20.

"As I told you, we left St. Morenvillers on August 1. The village being invaded by Colonial and black

troops, we and our lorries were sent here to Auvillers, which is six kilometres to the west. It is a pretty village of some seven hundred inhabitants, well provisioned, with a beautiful church and a *pelote basque* court. It is obvious, from the construction and arrangement of the village, that a deputy lives here.

"I had the good-luck to find immediately on my arrival a real bed in a good room. Close by we have our mess in right royal fashion. Our lorries are not idle, we are working every day. Sometimes we leave at three or four a.m. and return at night, or sometimes in the afternoon, and then we are out all night. Already the nights are cool, almost cold.

"Rosières is the place we generally travel to at night—it is always bombarded during the day. On arriving the other day at eight p.m., we were told that two hours before, a body of engineers who had just arrived had been annihilated by one single 150-shell—forty dead and many wounded. We stayed there till eleven p.m. waiting to take on board soldiers of the *genie;* during that time fortunately not a shell came. Yet the enemy guns would have had a good bag, for lorries filled with men were careering around in every direction. Of course our lights were extinguished, and we had to drive in complete darkness. The roads were full of shell-holes, so it was not an easy job. I lay flat on the mud-guard so that I might see better, and directed my pal at the wheel. What dust! It was impossible to put on our goggles, for we should have seen nothing at all. Yet we had to get back, and to travel quickly too! After a bit—it was while I was driving—the lorry in front went so fast that I could not keep up with it, and in conse-

quence we found ourselves—six lorries—lost at Quiry-le-Sec. Fortunately I had a map, and therefore took the lead and brought the lorries back by Breteuil. We arrived at five a.m., spitting dust. But the dust in summer and the cold in winter are nothing to the shells, so we must not complain.

" Last Sunday by good-luck we were resting in the morning, for I had promised to sing Faure's ' Crucifix ' at church with the wife of a man in our mess. There are quite a number of women about here, and every day others are arriving—wives of motor-drivers, of officers, and of soldiers belonging to infantry regiments, who are passing through or resting at Auvillers in the second army zone. The first army zone ends at the railway-line at Baunes. Apparently the military authorities are becoming more indulgent on this delicate question of allowing women through, with the idea, I suppose, either of keeping up the spirits of the troops, or of compensating them for the small number of leaves given during this everlasting war.

" We sang, then, the ' Crucifix ' last Sunday during the Offertory.

> " ' Vous qui pleurez venez à ce Dieu car il pleure
> Vous qui souffrez venez à lui car il guérit
> Vous qui tremblez venez à lui car il sourit
> Vous qui passez venez à lui car il demeure.'

" Madame Blanc has a beautiful clear voice, a voice well adapted for the ' Crucifix ' sung in church. I was nervous myself, for these night expeditions and meals of dust do not improve one's voice.

" All went well, however, and people seemed pleased. The church was full of residents and soldiers. We had two good violins to accompany us. The whole service

was to the accompaniment of music which I conducted from the gallery. At the end, I started singing the 'Cantique de la Vierge,' with its famous chorus, 'Ave, Ave, Ave Maria,' in which everyone joined. It reminded me of the Basque choirs conducted by the Biarritz tenor Rupert, whom, hélas! I could only emulate feebly. This Sunday which began so happily ended in Rosières. For just as we finished lunch, we were called up and spent the whole night out.

"Monsieur Roux has written to me confirming the answer of the G.Q.G. about my release from the army. 'Impossible, in view of the scarcity of drivers.' That is the result of the endless correspondence undertaken by my Bank on my behalf.

"Well, well! I shall continue at my present profession, and shall not complain as long as we are in villages where I can find a bed and a decent mess. Unfortunately here, as in Ance, it is not easy to keep one's room, and we must use the craft of thieves and rogues, and obtain the complicity of our good hostess to protect ourselves from the numerous officers who are constantly passing through the village. Sometimes they turn us out in the most brutal fashion. One of my comrades of the 300, a 'nut,' as they call us in the detachment, had to sleep in the guard-room the other day, by order of a Commandant. For among these officers there are some who, even when there are rooms free and to spare, declare that a soldier has no right to sleep in a bed, though it is offered him and though he can pay for it! I consider, too, that they go too far in their unwarrantable searches for *embusqués de conducteurs*, for whom, as a matter of fact, there is an ever-growing need. Such an attitude is only fit for barracks, or on garrison duty, in peace-

time, and is misplaced in this hard war, which I myself should like to see conducted on more democratic lines."

On reading this letter, Isabelle threw herself full-length on the bed with outstretched arms. At last! At last! There was not a single word of explanation, of love, of apology, of gratitude, or of longing. But on the other hand nothing in it indicated that there was the slightest misunderstanding between them, and she understood very well that it was a message of reconciliation, and that the next morning, if not that very evening, she would receive another letter telling her to come. So certain was she that she began at once to make her preparations and plans. She was right in her surmise. The next morning another letter arrived.

"AUVILLERS,
"*August* 21, 1916.

"I have received all your letters safely, and read them all. I answer by confirming mine of last month —I have too little freedom at present to ask you to come and see this country, in spite of all the interest it contains. You reproach me for not writing. I wrote you a long letter yesterday, and, moreover, it does not please me to answer excitable, agitated letters. I am glad to hear from you always, but I do not care to receive five letters from you by the same post!

"Yes, I told you to come to me twice, and where to find me, but there are none so deaf as those who won't hear!

"Our lorries are out every other day, as I explained to you yesterday, and between times I am obliged to rest and sleep, so that I should be rarely free to take

you for walks in the neighbourhood, and you would have to remain indoors or go out alone.

"If, however, you would like to join me here in spite of this drawback, do so. I would like nothing better; but if you come, come at once and not in a week!

"Just now, since this morning only, the village is less crowded with officers and soldiers, but such a state of things will doubtless not last long.

"Try to arrive at Baunes by the midday train; an omnibus meets that train and brings passengers to the village. I myself cannot go to the station; it is absolutely out of the question. At Auvillers you have only to ask for Madame Fauvel—it is the house next door to the only *pâtisserie* of the village—and give her your name. She is keeping a room for you.

"It is absolutely useless to write to me or tell me the time of your arrival—I shall expect you any time after the day after to-morrow. It is quite impossible for me to leave the village or to come to the station to meet you.

"I read and meditated on what you said about my supposed virile qualities. Your compliments leave me cold, I must own. I am like other men, worth perhaps a little more, perhaps a little less. And if I really am superior in any way, it is only in a way that concerns yourself, and even then I owe it only to the weapons with which you yourself have furnished me. Thank you all the same for your appreciation."

These last words thrilled Isabelle as she read, just as they had thrilled her when he had used them to her once before. If a little regret stole into her

mind that she herself, and her praise and admiration of "virile" qualities, were the cause of his masterfulness and occasional seeming roughness, she stifled it quickly. She thirsted for a character stronger and more decided than her own, and this masterfulness of his, whether assumed or not, she could not forgo. She had produced it and she gloried in it. Should she wish later to overcome it, she did not doubt she could succeed. No hint of "playing with fire" crossed her mind.

The very same day that she received this letter Isabelle went to Paris, and the next found her at the Gare du Nord.

When she had seated herself, hot and tired and flustered, in her compartment, she found that there was still another twenty minutes before the train started. There had been no need at all for all her terror and excitement and hurry. The military police agent, who had looked at her "sauf-conduit," had given her a terrible fright. He had beckoned her to stand aside from the stream of passengers who were making their way to the platform. Trembling with apprehension, and thinking that she was already stopped before she had started on her journey, she obeyed, looking up at him questioningly. "Vous n'avez pas signé votre nom." She fumbled in her bag for her fountain-pen, but he went on to say that if she had a pen she could wait and sign it in the train. He evidently noticed her look of relief that nothing further was required of her, for he smiled patronizingly, but with a little shrug of his shoulders, as much as to say: "Mais ce n'est pas fini! Vous n'êtes pas encore arrivée!" When the ink had dried on her precious paper and it had been returned to her bag, she looked round at her

travelling companions. There were two non-coms., an elderly civilian, and a mother and daughter. She objected very much to eating her lunch before so many people, yet there was no help for it, for she was so hungry that she felt she could not even wait till the train started. So she started boldly on her sandwiches, screening herself with her *Daily Mail* as much as possible. Everybody but her, it seemed, had already lunched. Officers and soldiers were by this time hurrying along the platform carrying coats and packs, and a few minutes before the train started there was a greater rush still. The doors of the train, continually shut by the porters, were rapidly opened again by some hot, perspiring officer; in fact, many jumped in as the train moved out of the station. Isabelle noticed a few English officers. She wondered whether there were British troops in Auvillers, but supposed they were men who had spent their leave in Paris and were returning to regiments in the Somme area. Even the corridor was now full of people, who one after another took a survey of the compartment to see if there was any vacant seat, or at least available space on the rack for their parcels and coats. Isabelle was very thirsty, but she had forgotten her drinking cup, and how could she manage with this half-bottle of wine in front of so many people! To add to her discomfiture, she noticed, or at least thought she noticed, that several officers looked at her curiously, as if they guessed her secret and recognized that she was on some compromising adventure. If she did not drink the wine, she would be compelled to eat a peach or some of the grapes bought for de Gaurival at the last moment. That seemed a pity, as she knew there would be no chance

of buying fruit in the little village where she was going. But all these trivialities vanished when suddenly, to her horror, she noticed that the name of the first station where they stopped did not agree with that on her time-table! Had she taken the wrong train? She waited in suspense till the next station. That one too was not marked. She did not want to ask questions, for her accent would betray her nationality, and she would thus attract attention. But at last she summoned courage to address the woman opposite in a low voice, who answered that a détour was always made at this point, as the traffic was so tremendous on the Champigny lines. What a relief!

At Clermont, numbers of officers and men left the train. Isabelle's interest in all that was going on here received a sudden check, for she saw two military police board the train at either end. Her heart seemed to stop beating as they wended their way from compartment to compartment and approached nearer and nearer. Would she be questioned in front of this carriageful of people? One of them came in. He was armed with a notebook, a pencil, and a stamp. As soon as he appeared she handed him her "sauf-conduit." He looked at her, said nothing, took out his stamp, stamped her paper, put his signature across it and handed it back. Her only thought was, "This shall be my last journey to the war zone! I've had enough of it! It frightens me too much. I'm not equal to all this excitement, and agitation! Even if I get to my destination safely, I will never try it again!"

There was a man with only one leg in the corridor. He had put his crutches on the floor and leaned out of the window to talk to soldiers on the platform every

time the train stopped. Isabelle wondered if he often came that way, and so was addressing acquaintances, or whether it was pure *joie de vivre* which made him so friendly to everyone. He was extremely cheerful, and though several people offered him a seat, he said he preferred standing at the window. He blocked the carriage doorway, and the stump of his leg, which had been amputated a few inches from the top, was just on a level with Isabelle's face. Though she felt an immense pity for this big, strong, cheerful man who was so hopelessly crippled, this stump waving about on a line with her eyes was more than she could stand, and after a bit, therefore, she got up and stood beside him in the corridor.

At St. Just a wonderful sight met her eyes. To the right of the little station she saw what looked like one big wave of blue—hundreds of soldiers in serried ranks, waiting probably for a train to take them to the front. All had packs and rifles. A light barrier separated them from the platform, and those leaning against it called out to the men on the train or smiled, nodded, and joked with some pretty face at a window.

There was at last only one more station before Isabelle reached her destination, and her hands trembled as she put on her veil and gloves. She had registered her dressing-case, for fear she could find no carriage or porter to take it to Auvillers, which was four miles from the station, and had with her only what she felt able to carry that distance herself—that is to say, a little leather despatch-case, a small box of grapes, and her umbrella. She would have preferred her stick for a country walk, but an umbrella gave her a more ordinary appearance, and that was to be sought at all costs.

As soon as the train stopped, she jumped down and made her way quickly to the exit. Not more than a dozen people had left the train besides herself. She saw no military police, and could hardly believe her luck when, after giving up her tickets to a youth of sixteen, she found herself free and on the highroad. Still fearing some obstruction she hurried forward, anxious to put a safe distance between herself and the station. Fifty yards along the road she saw an officer on a side-path, evidently waiting for somebody and anxious to avoid notice. She felt sympathy with him. She asked him if she was on the right road for Auvillers. "Yes," was his answer. "Go straight through the village of Baune, which you see in the distance and which is half-way, and take the first turning to the right. Did you arrive by the one-fifteen from Paris?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice other ladies leaving the train here?"

"Two or three."

It seemed as though he could stand his suspense no longer, for when Isabelle looked round shortly after, she saw he had left his retreat and was striding down the centre of the road towards the station.

She, of course, had not expected Gauri to meet her. He had told her it was impossible, and she had not even looked around for him. After a time her case began to weigh rather heavily, and she remembered with regret that she had not thought of inquiring if there was any sort of conveyance.

In the centre of Baune she came upon a huge crowd of soldiers. Were they drilling, or on parade, or what was happening? Isabelle would willingly have taken a back street so as to avoid going through them all, but the nearest soldiers were already turning round

and staring at her, and she dared not turn tail. She soon discovered that the crowd was due to a military band, which did its daily best to enliven the village for at least one hour of the twenty-four. To judge from the large audience it would seem its efforts were appreciated, but during the pauses, they looked round for other attractions or amusement, as Isabelle found to her cost. She had to run the gauntlet of all these curious and interested eyes before she found herself once again on the open road between hedges and fields. She heard a vehicle behind her, and moved to the side of the road to let it pass; but it still remained behind and she looked round. It was a Red Cross lorry drawn by two big, strong horses, and driven by a soldier perched high up on his box. Another soldier sat beside him, and they were evidently keeping pace with her intentionally. Two or three hundred metres from the village they whipped up the horses and came alongside of her. They said something to her which Isabelle did not catch distinctly, but her parcels were so heavy that she immediately jumped to the conclusion that they were offering to carry them for her. The ruddy colouring and the open, good-natured expressions of the men were so reassuring, that Isabelle handed up her parcels with alacrity. So high was the seat that the soldier leaning down could only just reach them with difficulty. As soon as he had placed them at his feet, he clambered down. "Je vais vous aider à monter, Madame." Isabelle was taken by surprise. She explained she had not understood that they intended to give her a lift, that she thanked them, but said that it was out of the question. She would not listen to their arguments, and asked for her parcels back, saying she could easily finish her journey on

foot. But they would not take "No," nor return her her parcels, and finally she found herself using the spokes of the great wheel to clamber up by, and was hauled on to the driver's seat. As soon as she was safely seated between the two men, the horses started off at a quick pace. For a minute, the rest to her arms and legs and the rapid movement along the road exhilarated and pleased her, but very soon feelings of nervousness overcame all others.

"Please put me down. It is not so much for myself as for you I ask it. If you are caught, you will be punished."

"Oh no—that's all right."

"But a woman between two soldiers on a military vehicle will result in a tremendous fuss if we are seen."

"No officers ever come along here."

"I don't mind taking risks for myself, but I won't get others into trouble. I'm already in a district in which I ought not to be, as you can guess; I have no business in the army zone."

"Oh, we've often taken women from the station as far as Auvillers. Sometimes, when the ambulance has been empty, we have hidden them inside. There's no harm, and it's a long walk for a lady."

"Oh, I don't mind it. I'm used to walking. I like the exercise after my train journey. Please, please, put me down!"

"Not yet. There is no risk. You're quite safe."

"But I'd rather walk."

"You get along quicker this way."

"Yes, but all the same. . . ."

"You think your amoureux will be jealous? I would not have asked you to come if I'd been alone, but with two of us he can't mind."

"It is not that."

"Are you afraid of him? Is he so very terrible?" and with open, good-natured curiosity, they tried to find out whom Isabelle was going to see. She tried to laugh, and made her answers as vague as possible. Then suddenly she stopped talking and her fears were increased tenfold, for she saw two men walking along the road in the distance.

"Voilà des officiers. Laissez-moi descendre, je vous en prie."

But they told her laughingly not to *s'inquiéter*, and that the figures in the distance were certainly not officers.

By this time they were approaching the outskirts of Auvillers. Here and there a house was to be seen among the orchards. Did they mean to drive her right into the village? In desperation, Isabelle at last caught hold of the reins, and one hand over the other drew in the two horses. "Vous savez aussi conduire, Mademoiselle?" They allowed her to bring the animals to a standstill, and explained that they would, in any case, have had to put her down at the next clump of trees, for there she must turn to the right down the high street, while they must go to the left. Again the soldier jumped to the ground in order the better to help her down, and then restored to her her parcels. She thanked them heartily, and now that she was safely down, she really felt very grateful to them for the lift. They listened politely, though she felt they regarded her as a foolish child frightened for nothing, and drove off.

Isabelle, as she walked down the high street, looked right and left for anything resembling a *pâtisserie*. All the shops were so insignificant-looking that it took

a little discernment to recognize that they were shops at all, still more to distinguish which was a *boucherie* or which an *épicerie*.

She avoided asking any of the passing soldiers, and walked straight forward trying to look as unconcerned as possible. But the village street seemed never-ending, and fearing she had passed the *pâtisserie*, she at last stopped and questioned a soldier walking alone.

"Mais je ne connais aucune pâtisserie dans ce patelin, Mademoiselle. Whom do you want to see? If I can be of any service——"

There was nothing for it but to say the name.

"I want to speak to a lorry-driver, Monsieur de Gaurival."

"Gaurival, mais je le connais bien, Mademoiselle. Si vous voulez me permettre de vous accompagner."

He took her parcels with a politeness which brooked of no refusal, and moved forward.

"But perhaps I ought not to be seen walking with you?"

"We are just there!—only a few yards farther. Is Gaurival expecting you to-day, Mademoiselle?" and then fearing to have been indiscreet, he went on: "He is certain to be in; we only arrived back at midday, after having been out the whole night."

Isabelle then noticed for the first time that he too was a motor-driver. What very bad luck! She had evidently fallen in with one of Gauri's own motor detachment. Would Gauri be angry that her arrival should become known to his friends?

They arrived at a great *porte cochère* and entered a courtyard, where Isabelle's companion called out loudly, "Gauri, Gauri!" looking up the while to a curtained window. Isabelle's heart beat more violently

than ever as she heard the familiar voice: "Qu'est-ce que c'est ? Je viens. Je viens."

"He is there. This way, Mademoiselle," and without waiting for a head to appear at the window, he led her into a big kitchen where an old woman and two soldiers were busy round a central stove. He lifted the latch of a small door and disclosed a narrow wooden staircase. "Si vous voulez vous donner la peine de monter l'escalier, Mademoiselle, vous trouverez Gaurival." He handed her her parcels and closed the door behind her.

Isabelle tried to slip up quietly, but her footsteps resounded on the uncarpeted wooden stairs.

As she reached the top, a door at the end of a narrow passage opened. She walked in. Her first glance round the room, before there had been time for a single word, showed her that Gaurival had been just roused from sleep, and that he had been lying with half a dozen of her letters under his pillow.

CHAPTER XVI

BEHIND THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD

Two days later, Isabelle woke to find herself alone. She remembered in a flash Gauri's hasty departure in the middle of the night. They had been suddenly awakened by his friend who had climbed up a ladder placed ready in the courtyard, and tapped at the window. In less than five minutes Gauri had thrown on his clothes, caught up a piece of bread, his electric lamp, and his sheepskin, and had left her.

Where had he gone? When would he be back? Was he in danger? What should she do alone all day? How should she get her meals? This last question was prosaic but important, and she must solve it alone.

The day before, de Gaurival had fetched her *petit déjeuner* from downstairs and brought it to her in bed, but it had needed ingenuity to get their other meals served with any comfort and privacy.

The big dining-room, next door to the kitchen, was being used as an officers' mess, and the only other room downstairs was a small room leading out of it. This little room was put at their disposal, and it would have been perfect for them had it not been so awkward having to pass through the dining-room to get there, and also to have their food brought through to them. Gaurival managed to evade the difficulty by climbing in at the window, but Isabelle had to run the gauntlet of

the officers' curious gaze. They had stood up as she came into the room; she had blushed, bowed, apologized for intruding, and passed through to the farther door. She knew that as soon as she had disappeared they would question Madame Fauvel. Who was she? With whom was she staying? etc. Frenchmen at all times and seasons interest themselves in a woman. How much more, then, here in the war zone, where their quick eyes would immediately discover something unusual and scent a romance! De Gaurival had suggested that she too should climb in by the window on the next occasion. He seemed genuinely annoyed that she could not make herself invisible!

And now here was she alone, and how was she going to manage?

Her thoughts were interrupted by steps on the landing and a knock at the door. The old dame from downstairs had brought her a huge bowl of *café au lait* and a big roll of bread. So the first of the day's difficulties was overcome! Here was her breakfast! If only it had been possible to forgo washing and eating for a few days, how things would have been simplified! But meanwhile, having had one meal, she lay back on the pillows and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the past few days and the prospect of those to come. Was she really in his rooms and among his belongings again? She looked around to reassure herself, and then closed her eyes and lay motionless for a long time with a half-smile on her lips. Was it possible to feel more intensely in the future than she had done in the past? How long could such a life last? But she brushed that question aside. The present was theirs, and she meant to make the most of it. How many hours before his return?

He had said he would be away about twenty hours, and he had started at one a.m. He might be there for dinner, but she must be prepared to have at least one more meal alone.

After a time she thought of getting up, but she wanted hot water. There was no bell, and she dared not call out to the old woman; she watched the courtyard from the window for a time, in the hopes of seeing her pass by. As she did not appear, she dressed and went boldly downstairs into the kitchen. Two soldiers were there paring potatoes. In reply to her demand for hot water, one of them filled a little white milk-jug from the kettle on the stove and presented it to her. "Je voudrais plus que ça, si c'est possible." She looked around for any sort of can, but could find none. The soldier finally went to the cupboard and drew forth a round china soup-tureen. Isabelle accepted this with thanks, but found it no easy matter to carry upstairs. It held what would certainly count as a plentiful supply of soup, but as a receptacle for bath-water, it was futile!

She dressed slowly, meaning to go for a walk, though she dreaded the crowded village street which she must traverse before reaching a country road. But as there was not even an armchair in her room, and it was impossible to be comfortable there, she made up her mind to the attempt.

Just outside the village, in a field adjoining an orchard, some soldiers were sitting or lying about on the grass. They were mostly amusing themselves by throwing unripe apples at each other, though one or two sat apart in a ditch writing letters. Isabelle was wondering why they were all there, when suddenly they got up with one accord and, moving towards a

tree, each one seized a bugle and began to practise on it. The noise was hideous. They did not group themselves by dozens or half-dozens together, as one might have expected, but each practised individually. In spite of the discordant sounds which made Isabelle block her ears, she could not help laughing at the comic sight they presented. They turned their backs on each other, each choosing a place in the shade where he could be entirely independent of anyone else. Some were evidently making tremendous efforts without producing the slightest sound, while others had already improved sufficiently for the notes to be distinguishable. One or two soldiers who were looking in Isabelle's direction noticed her amusement, and smiled too as they paused to take breath and mop their brows. As the woods were damp with last night's rain Isabelle decided to keep to the road, and chose the Paris-Amiens one as being the most interesting. In spite of the enormous traffic it was, like all the other roads in the Somme area, in perfect condition, and the high trees on either side made it shady and pleasant.

Before long she met some fifty horses being taken for exercise. They came along in pairs, a soldier riding one bareback and leading the other. Then came some empty motor-ambulances, then a unit of soldiers on the march. Besides these, dashing along in either direction there was a constant succession of military cars, for which every convoy made way; and also there were isolated soldiers hurrying along, either starting on or returning from leave. All were carrying paper parcels, all were hot and tired, and yet were pressing forward as if anxious to catch some train.

Just as she was thinking of retracing her steps, she

saw the sight she dreaded just now most in the world —two military police. They were walking leisurely, and at first Isabelle hoped she might be able to turn back before they noticed her. But it was too late, and trying to look unconcerned, she walked on to meet them. A yard or two before she reached them they stopped and waited for her to come up to them.

"Où allez-vous, Mademoiselle, je vous prie ?"

"Je me promène. Je viens d'Auvillers. Ce n'est pas permis d'aller par ici ?"

Instead of answering, he repeated her words: "Vous venez d'Auvillers ?" And Isabelle, with sinking heart, thought he was going to ask her address there.

She kept her presence of mind and produced her papers. "Oui, voulez-vous mon sauf-conduit ?" She handed it him, and both men looked at it. "C'est bien," and it was handed back to her.

Now that the danger seemed past, Isabelle was furious with them that she should have been so frightened for nothing, and, as indignantly as she dared, she again demanded if it was not permitted to walk on that road, that they had stopped her thus. Her tone and sudden dignity did not seem to impress them, however, and without giving any direct answer they continued their way. After this she decided to run no more risks, but to avoid the highroads and stick to the woods and fields.

It was lunch-time on her return, and her old landlady met her at the door and, with beaming countenance, informed her that "Messieurs les officiers" had invited her to lunch with them, having heard she was alone for the whole of the day. Of all things Isabelle felt this was to be avoided. How could she hide her

identity throughout a whole meal? In conversation she was sure to make some slip which would give her away, or at any rate awaken still greater curiosity. She tried to explain to Madame Fauvel that she was there *en cachette*, that she did not want to see or speak to anybody, and that she was certain to get herself or Gauri into trouble if she accepted the officers' invitation. Madame Fauvel replied that there were a great many women in Auvillers in the same circumstances, and that nobody thought anything of it. She evidently considered Isabelle very stupid, and was most annoyed at the possibility of having to prepare a separate lunch for her. If Isabelle lunched with the officers, it would make little or no extra work for the soldiers who cooked and served them, and it would save her any at all.

Isabelle, however, stood firm; she told Madame Fauvel to say she had a very bad "migraine," and much regretted not to be able to accept their kind invitation; moreover, she told her she did not mind going without lunch, but on no account did she intend to go to the officers' mess. She crept upstairs, and later on Madame Fauvel probably relented, for she brought her a little cold food on a tray.

Isabelle now looked round for something to read. The books she had brought for Gauri she had already read. She looked in one or two drawers, but they were crammed with clothes belonging to the *propriétaire*. Indeed, her ownership was very much in evidence. The walls, mantelpiece and shelves were already crammed with family heirlooms, hideous portraits side by side with Bible pictures more hideous still. Porcelain vases, crucifixes, china figures, dirty little straw-plaited ornaments collecting dust and dirt,

filled every corner. Postcards were stuck here and there. The contents of the drawers seemed in keeping with the walls and shelves. Could the French be so thrifty to collect such a number of useless objects? Where in all this muddle did Gauri keep his things? He had given her one empty drawer for her own possessions, which, however, was just now filled with a small bundle of his vests and socks just returned from the wash. Had he no other belongings? She noticed his kit-bag in a corner, and her eyes lighted up. Sitting on a small stool beside it, she undid the straps, and it opened. It was not locked. She prepared to enjoy herself by examining all his treasures one by one. The first thing she laid hands on was his diary, and soon she became engrossed in reading and rereading every word, every line. What interested her most were the entries concerning herself, especially those during the days that followed her last departure and those that preceded her arrival this time. These curt, matter-of-fact, business-like notes would not have revealed much to the ordinary reader, but Isabelle could read between the lines, and drew from them a sense which was not expressed in words. Satisfaction, triumph, pleasure, gratitude were depicted in her face. The war news, too, interested her, and she read many facts here which he had not related in his letters. Having read it to the end, she put the note-book on the floor and burrowed once more into the bag. Here was the little brush she had sent him nearly a year ago, then came a scarf she had given him, then a whole bundle of photos he had taken of her at different times since he first knew her. He had kept them all, then! As she looked at them one by one, all the story of their love came back to

her, and the remembrance filled her with emotion. With an effort she put them down on the floor and explored farther. A bundle of letters, each in its envelope. She recognized the handwriting of his mother and sisters and different friends, and put them down. None of hers. Then she withdrew his "briquet," his electric lamp, a box of cigarettes. Every object which had been used by him interested her, and she handled each with tenderness. Many of these little things she had given him, and she looked to see if they had been used or worn; and those which she did not recognize she eyed jealously. Then came a bundle wrapped round with newspapers and tied with string. She opened it. Oh, her letters! They were all together in a big envelope, and she noticed they were carefully arranged in the order in which they had arrived. She felt they had been loved and were sacred to their owner. Some were worn with being carried for days in a coat-pocket before being placed with the others. Isabelle was tempted to read one or two to remind herself of how and when she wrote of certain incidents, but she felt that, though they were her own letters, she must not touch them. From the envelopes and their postmarks she remembered and gathered much, and in this way she discovered that certain letters were missing. What had happened to them? Were they so loved that Gauri never parted with them, or had they been torn up and destroyed? This question became all-important to her. While she was tying up the bundle in the newspaper again, she heard a step on the stairs. Gauri! She had no time to put the things straight again and hide her afternoon's occupation, even if she had wished to; but she suddenly felt anxious as

to what he would say when he found her thus. She sat still, however, and when Gauri entered in his usual imperious manner, he found Isabelle still on her footstool on the floor, surrounded on all sides, as far as arm could reach, by all the contents of his bag. Never had his private possessions been touched by other hand than his own since those days, long, long past, when he had a valet, and the shock was no slight one. However, the rights and wrongs of Isabelle's conduct were not long discussed, for other subjects interested them far more. "Scold me when I'm with you, but not when I am away," is what Isabelle often used to write to Gauri. What could it really matter to her if he was angry? All his moods were dear to her, even his anger, and she did not mind anything so long as they were together. The only thing she would have found unforgivable was neglect or indifference, and she had never had to reproach him with that, so long as they were within reach of one another. In the matter of writing certainly he had neglected her, but she knew that it was not due to indifference, but because pride prevented him from saying what he really felt. So long as they were together, no pose or mood of either could alienate the other; moods which might have destroyed mere friendship created between these lovers even a greater attraction. During the next few days the continued long absences of Gauri only served to heighten their ardour. The dust, discomfort, and danger of the road for him, the enforced idleness and loneliness for Isabelle, merely enhanced the pleasure of the hours they spent together. And never were their senses more quickened and attuned than during that first week at Auvillers.

CHAPTER XVII

IN A MOTOR-LORRY

"If you are dressed in five minutes, I will take you in the lorry with me."

Gauri had burst open the door with this exclamation, just as Isabelle was dropping off to sleep again after his early departure. It was still quite dark.

"Oh, Gauri, I should love it, but I don't feel well this morning, and I don't know if I can manage it."

"Well, don't come, then, but here's your chance. I'll be back in five minutes to see what you mean to do."

He disappeared again, banging the door.

Isabelle rolled out of bed, she could not miss this adventure which she had begged for so often. She would never forgive herself if no other opportunity occurred. She would probably feel better when once she was up, and in any case it could not be more than the beginning of a cold that made her feel so wretched.

When Gauri returned, Isabelle was already dressed. He brought her some hot coffee, but without milk, and when Isabelle made a grimace he said that if she wanted to sample the life of a lorry-driver, she must also sample his food. So she drank it down while she listened to his instructions. His lorry was the last on the line, and he was to drive it alone, as his comrade was ill. She must wait for him a little past the cross-roads, and when he came up to her he would

be able to stop, as he was the last of the convoy, and she must jump in. She would have to slip down under the rugs to hide from passing vehicles.

"I can't bear the idea of waiting on the road. Let me get in now at once."

"Not possible. Villagers always collect round when we are about to start. Nobody, not even a child, must see you."

Isabelle stationed herself at the spot decided upon, half-hidden behind a hedge, and waited anxiously. It was very chilly in the early morning, but though very tired, the excitement bore her up. She listened intently, and every minute seemed an hour. Suddenly she distinctly heard the buzz of a motor. The engines were being started. The air was so still that she could distinguish the difference in sound as they began to move, and she peeped out along the road. Here came the first immense Saurer car, taking up most of the roadway; the second was about a hundred yards behind. She counted, as she thought, nine lorries, and when the tenth came along she dashed into the middle of the road and waved her hand. But it was not Gauri; the chauffeur hooted and passed on. Most of the drivers were wearing their goat-skins, and their caps were drawn so low down over their foreheads that it was impossible to recognize them. Isabelle quickly moved to one side, and then perceived that another lorry was coming along behind. The man driving waved his hand. Gauri at last! The huge car slowed down and came to a standstill.

"You really want to come?"

"Of course I do. I've been waiting here nearly half an hour. Don't say you don't want me after all!"

"It's dangerous. The lieutenant is with the convoy. When I proposed your coming, I thought it was only the non-com. in charge."

"I'm ready to risk it. You've only to drop me if we get in a tight corner. Besides, I can hide under the cover."

"If you are caught, there will be the deuce of a row. But jump in, we can't stand discussing here."

Isabelle was soon wrapped in rugs by his side and, in spite of the hardness of the seat, of the noise of the engine, and the shaking and jerks of such a heavy car, she felt comfortable and happy. And she knew the happiness was mutual, though unexpressed. Every time they passed other traffic, she plunged down like a jack-in-the-box, and they both laughed and enjoyed the joke. Once all the lorries came to a standstill and Isabelle grew nervous. Suppose she was found! What would happen to her? Unless she could answer all questions and completely prove her identity, she would be taken for a spy. She was just asking Gauri from beneath the rug if it was safe to sit up again when he gave her a nudge with his knee. Somebody had come up and was talking to him. She made a tiny hole between the rug and the mackintosh and peeped through. It was a driver from one of the other lorries. His talk was of mere trifles, but she had a sudden fear that he was suspicious, and had come on purpose to have a look round; also that he was staring at her and could see her. But suddenly there was a shrill whistle, the driver dashed away, and a minute later the convoy moved forward once more.

"Gauri, did he guess anything?" said Isabelle, as she again emerged into the light and air.

"Oh no, how could he? But I expect we shall be in difficulties before long."

The road had become less good, and the cars in front were sending up clouds of dust. Isabelle felt suffocated; her eyes, nose, and mouth were full of dust, and it gave her no consolation to hear that it was sometimes much worse than this, and that she was tasting the life of a driver under the very best conditions. Indeed, Gauri said he wished she could just experience for a few minutes what driving in the rain and cold was like!

Suddenly there was another stop. This time it was a lorry which had engine trouble. It was ordered to stand aside, and the convoy went on without it. "If it catches up again, that means we shall not be at the rear of the line. Lorries are not allowed to overtake each other or change places."

But they were still the last car when they reached the little station of Rosières, where they were to take their munitions on board. Isabelle was very interested in the manœuvres necessary to get the immense cars in position for loading them with the heavy shell-cases. But the bang with which each case was dumped into the lorry made her tremble. She was feeling very sick and giddy, and longed to get away from the car while it was being loaded. But they were surrounded on every side by drivers, railway officials, and officers. She must keep in her place at all costs. At each impact, it seemed to her as if the shells must explode and she be blown to atoms.

When, finally, they could start again and she resumed her seat by de Gaurival, she was no longer able to feel or show any gaiety or enthusiasm. But de Gaurival was elated with the success which had so

far attended them. He considered the most difficult part of their journey was over, and that if he could keep Isabelle successfully hidden at Rosières as he had done, the rest of the trip was mere child's play. He was disappointed that she did not show her usual pleasure in the adventure, and did not notice how she flagged and was feeling every minute more tired and ill.

They were half-way towards the dump where they were to deposit their munitions when de Gaurival's engines began to give out curious noises.

"If something goes wrong here, we're in a nice fix!" He required a tool which was under the seat, and poor Isabelle had to climb off the car while he hunted for it. De Gaurival worked in haste, glancing down the road to see that nobody was coming back to look for him. He restarted the car, but the engine still gave trouble.

Isabelle sat down by the roadside while he set to work again. Her head was aching so terribly that she was hardly aware of what was going on. After ten minutes he joined her, dripping with perspiration.

"I can't even restart it this time. I don't know what's gone wrong. When the convoy reaches the dump I shall be missed, and the lieutenant will come to look for me. What am I going to do with you?"

Isabelle did not answer, and de Gaurival, looking at her more closely, noticed for the first time how ill she was.

"This is a nice fix! Why to goodness did I bring you out here? What a fool I was!"

This roused Isabelle. "It's all right! I'll walk back to the next village and take a carriage or cart. Don't bother about me."

"You can't walk, can you?" he said, more gently.

"Oh yes."

"But it's at least six kilometres to the last village. It will take you more than an hour on foot."

"I can manage it."

De Gaurival was relieved. He had never seen Isabelle ill, and could not believe that it was more than a momentary indisposition. He patted her shoulder encouragingly, and put some bread and chocolate in her pocket.

"That's in case you can't get a meal before you reach Auvillers. But don't start yet. Wait behind the hedge till you see what becomes of me."

Isabelle lay half-dozing on the grass, and saw as in a dream the lieutenant's little car come whirling back in a cloud of dust.

When he had departed again de Gaurival came to her.

"He is sending back another lorry to take me in tow. There's no hiding you now unless I let my comrades into the secret, and you see I don't know who will come back for me. Besides, I may have to wait here an hour or two. If you can manage it, I think you'd better walk back to the next village as you suggest."

"All right."

"Are you well enough?"

"Oh yes. If there's a chemist's there I shall try to get some phenacetin. Don't worry about me."

He helped her to her feet. She said good-bye, and for the first hundred yards or so she walked with brisk firmness. But as soon as a turn in the road hid her from Gauri's sight, her first effort failed, and she doubled up with fatigue. She could hardly drag one foot after the other.

She approached the first woman she saw on the outskirts of the village and asked from whom she could hire a cart. The woman said there were no conveyances of any sort for hire, not even a bicycle. Isabelle went down the street and stopped at a baker's. They had a cart, but it was out. All her inquiries were fruitless. There seemed no solution as to how to get to Auvillers. Yet it must be possible, and she walked on. She was now feeling really ill; her head ached more terribly than ever, and she was very feverish. If she did not fall in with some sort of conveyance soon, it would be dark before she arrived. It was already three o'clock, and she had at least twenty-five kilometres to go. Should she start along the road and leave it to chance to get a lift? But suppose she was stranded half-way? Besides, she was too tired to do another kilometre. The next person she addressed was a plough-boy. This time she began by putting five francs into his hand, and told him she would give him another five when he had procured her some sort of a vehicle. She would pay anything that was asked of her to be taken to Auvillers *at once*. He asked one or two questions, and went off in search.

Isabelle sat down on a low stone wall. Perhaps he would simply go off with the five francs and she would not see him again. But at least she must wait now for a bit. She would fain have lain down by the roadside, so tired and ill did she feel. Every minute waiting there seemed like an hour, and she was beginning to give up hope when the faithful messenger appeared in sight.

He had found a small farmer who was willing to take her to Auvillers as soon as he could harness his horse.

He would take her to him. But she felt so sick and giddy she found she could hardly walk the hundred yards or so to the farm. She was thankful to find the cart and driver ready and waiting for her. It was a large rough cart for carrying wood or farm produce to market; the horse was a great heavy beast, evidently used for ploughing. But these details were trifling to her at the moment; all she cared for was that she would now arrive at Auvillers dead or alive. She must see Gauri before she died, or at least he must know that she had succeeded in returning home. She was now quite certain that she was very ill, probably dying, and she began to fear her mind might give way before arriving at her destination.

They jogged along very slowly. "Bijou" had been in the fields all day, and moreover was not used to trotting at any time, and all the "Allez, Bijou!" of the driver and the crackings of his whip were of little avail. The man explained that he had only meant to go to Auvillers on the morrow, that he must now stay there overnight, that this would cause him extra expense and inconvenience, etc. Isabelle said she understood and would pay his expenses, and to stop him conversing with her she asked if she might lie down on the straw at the back of the cart. The wooden plank, on which she and the driver were seated, was so hard that every jolt seemed as if it was breaking her to pieces.

In the straw behind she was a little less shaken, and in spite of her pain and fever she began to doze. She still heard in her sleep the "Allez, Bijou!" and the questions addressed to her by the farmer, but she did not attempt to answer. She had asked him to wake her on the outskirts of the village, and suddenly

she felt the jolting cease. They had stopped. Isabelle tried to rouse herself. She found they were at the entrance to the village, and that it was quite dark. The man was questioning her: "Where did she want to be put down?" Isabelle, by a superhuman effort, pulled herself up and asked him to help her to dismount. She said she wanted to go no farther, thanked him, paid him, and tried to walk upright and in a straight line. She did not want him to know where she was staying. She was already tottering against the wall. He evidently had not noticed how ill she was, for she heard him talking to his horse. If she could walk just another fifty yards she would be safe! Would Gauri be there to help her to bed? If only he had arrived! It was seven already. She could not believe it was only some fifteen hours since they had started off so happily. His journeys took him some twenty hours, so perhaps he would not yet be there. Well, she would get into bed as she was and undress later.

Climbing the little wooden staircase towards her room was Isabelle's last distinct remembrance. De Gaurival was not there, and she tottered towards the bed, dragged herself on it, and lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XVIII

COMPLICATIONS AND CATASTROPHES

WHEN Gauri returned about midnight, he found Isabelle lying on her bed still in her outdoor dress. She was in a high fever and was slightly delirious. She recognized him, and with his help got to bed, but after a few minutes stopped her rather inconsequent chatter, and did not speak again nor seem to hear or understand what he said. Gauri was now really frightened. All the complications that would ensue if he called in a military doctor flashed through his mind. Yet he must not hesitate. Suppose Isabelle was dangerously ill! He would not at first let himself believe it, and tried to rouse her to talk, raising her into a more sitting position, tapping her hands, and talking to her in earnest tones. But for the first time in his experience he could not command her attention. There was no response. He himself was dead with fatigue and was tempted to lie down on the floor for a while, but he feared he might sleep on and not wake till morning. For he intended, as soon as it was light, to fetch a doctor. Meanwhile, he put wet towels on Isabelle's head, and felt a thrill of satisfaction when she sometimes said, " Ah, c'est bon, merci."

The doctor whom de Gaurival fetched was a young fellow belonging to an infantry regiment resting in the village, and had nothing to do with the Motor Trans-

port Service. He examined Isabelle carefully, then gave his verdict—typhoid fever. De Gaurival's heart sank. What should he do? He felt inclined to rush from the room, through fields and woods, and hide himself, so that no one with whom he was here connected should ever see him again. He hardly listened to what the doctor was saying, only wishing to get away from the room and the house. He wanted to be alone—to be able to think, to find a way of escape out of the terrible tangle into which he had precipitated them both. Yet when the doctor had gone, and he returned to the bedroom and saw that slender form he loved so well lying helpless on the bed, that beautiful body which seemed somehow already to have shrunk, a wave of pity and tenderness came over him. He forgot himself, the complications and the worries; one thought alone drove away all others—he must save Isabelle's life.

His first idea was to have her moved to Paris, as the doctor had suggested. But how? A military motor-ambulance? But the authorities would never allow one to go that distance for a non-military object. There were no public or private motor-cars in the village. Telegrams were forbidden, and even if he wrote for one from Paris, so many questions would be asked in order to obtain a "sauf-conduit" that it might be several days before it arrived. If he himself could be granted leave for twenty-four hours, he could take her by train perhaps. He could not find anybody in the village whom he could entrust with such a task, that was certain. Besides, a journey by train might possibly make her worse or even kill her. He thought of writing to her sister, but had he the right to betray Isabelle's secret till the last extremity?

In the end he determined to find a woman to nurse her where she was. He himself would help and look after her at night. He would ask for sick leave, and thus escape a few runs on his lorry. It would be the first time he had gone before the doctor since he was a driver, so it was hardly likely that his request would be refused.

He searched and made inquiries through the village, and at last found a strong healthy woman who would undertake to nurse Isabelle.

For four days this woman and de Gaurival nursed her with the greatest care and skill. The doctor, too, was most devoted. He paid her several visits a day, and brought hope and relief to both patient and nurses in the sick-room. De Gaurival with his overstrung nerves was most grateful for such help and sympathy. This young doctor, a mere second-lieutenant, had taken in the situation at a glance, had asked no unnecessary questions, and had shown great tact and skill. After four days Isabelle was no longer delirious, but so weak that she hardly spoke except to ask for water. De Gaurival was uncertain if she knew where she was or remembered the fatal lorry drive. He was expecting his leave during the first week in September. If Isabelle could be sufficiently well nursed till then he could himself take her to Paris, and their chief difficulties would be at an end.

But misfortunes never come singly. On the fifth day of Isabelle's illness, de Gaurival was told that his detachment was to start in twenty-four hours for a depot in the north. Rumour added that certain detachments were being concentrated there with a view to sending them to Salonika.

Not for the first time the idea of suicide flashed

through de Gaurival's mind as the only solution of all the terrible complications which were threatening him. But once more the sight of Isabelle and her changed appearance made him forget himself to think only of her.

He must get her back to her sister in Paris at any cost now. He could not leave her alone at Auvillers.

After consultation with the doctor, it was decided that she should leave for Paris the next day under the care of the woman who had been nursing her. The doctor promised to see her into the train, and to communicate with a colleague in Paris who would meet her at the Gare de l'Est. If only his instructions reached his friend in time, the journey would not be too trying for the patient.

De Gaurival's ingenuity, his power of persuasion, and his open-handedness had enabled him to get thus far without compromising Isabelle in any way, and without discovery and consequent punishment for himself. He must now make a superhuman effort if these last arrangements were to be carried through smoothly.

The woman was unwilling to go to Paris. The doctor had difficulty in procuring an ambulance to meet the particular train determined on. Their old hostess, Madame Fauvel, made innumerable difficulties about details of packing and other mere trifles, and handicapped him at every turn. He was tired out, himself, body and mind. He had not slept more than two hours at a stretch for nearly a week. He was at the mercy of every person who had to be consulted over the details of the journey, for he must depend on their secrecy and good faith. He could not act in an open manner. His amour-propre suffered

at every turn. Difficulties and vexations dogged his footsteps. Yet, in spite of all, he kept his head and succeeded in his arrangements, and the next afternoon Isabelle left Auvillers.

It tore his heart to see her start off in that helpless condition in the hands of strangers, and unable himself to go with her or do anything for her. He was uncertain if she realized what was happening, and if she was distressed or not at their separation. She spoke seldom, and then never to answer more than "Yes" or "No."

As soon as the carriage was out of sight, de Gaurival hurried to the headquarters of his detachment. The idea of being sent to Salonika, and the consequent separation from Isabelle was hateful to him, and he must find means of avoiding it if possible. He found that several of his comrades had got their transfer to other detachments, but that he himself, not having made an application for one, was still on the overseas list.

He immediately went in to see his C.O., and asked that he might exchange into some unit remaining in the country. Alas! he was told it was too late, that every facility had been given to drivers up to the middle of the morning to express their wishes, but that all names had just been telegraphed to Noisy-le-Sec and the orders made out.

De Gaurival's protestations only had the effect of arousing suspicion in the officer's mind. Why had he not made his demand at the same time as the other drivers? Now he came to think about it, why had he not been present with them that morning or the afternoon before? Where was he during that time? And how was it he had been absent during the last two runs to the front?

De Gaurival, foreseeing that he would have to submit to a whole string of questions with very little hope in the end of his request being granted, replied that as his demand was too late he must let the arrangement stand, and left the room.

Not that he seriously minded an inquiry now, either on his own or Isabelle's behalf. She was safely out of the way, and what did he care for himself as things stood? But he did not want to bring trouble on the doctor who had helped them in this terrible impasse. Everything had gone terribly wrong, everything seemed against him, and he felt it was no use striving further against fate.

Yet it was hard. He had come voluntarily from Algeria to fight for France, and after many months of menial work as soldier, cyclist, and lorry-driver, which was in every way unworthy of his organizing power, his brains and his gift of leadership, he was not even to serve in France. He was to be sent out of the country!

He tried to console himself with the reflection that if he could not see Isabelle, if she was too ill or too nervous ever to join him again, he would just as soon be in Salonika as in France. His mind would be more at rest if she was entirely out of reach than if he was continually planning ways and means of seeing her, only to be disappointed.

He remembered that if it had not been for Isabelle and the hope of winning her, he might never have volunteered. He might have said to himself, and quite justly, that he was serving his country better in Algiers, where he had a position of importance and trust, than as a soldier in the ranks. It was only owing to the woman he loved that he had persuaded

himself to the contrary, and now she was separated from him, possibly for ever. Well, he would now serve his country for his country's sake, and close his mind to all else. Thus he argued and wrestled with himself, attempting to fit his life into its new setting.

As he packed his bag, and remembered all that had passed in that small room, now so empty, he suddenly flung himself on the bed—the bed where Isabelle had lain unconscious so long—and wept bitter tears. Oh! if only she had been his wife, how different things would have been! He cursed his fate. He cursed himself for his pride and lies, though they had been used for a deliberate purpose, and he had a shrewd guess she knew it. Then he remembered his leave which was so nearly due. Were they going to deprive him of his seven days? They surely could not send him to Salonika without granting it—it was owing to him. Yet what should he do if he had it? Could he hover round a house in a Paris street without a hope of seeing his beloved? He remembered the plans, the glorious plans he had made with Isabelle. Despair again seized him. No, all was too hopeless; he would not protest, he would not mention his leave.

The lorry-drivers destined for Salonika were to leave Auvillers for Noisy-le-Sec early on the 29th, but at the last moment this was countermanded, and two days later they were still waiting for fresh orders.

The day they actually started, de Gaurival received a letter from the Paris doctor who had met Isabelle at the station and taken her to the Rue du Bouclier.

He said that she was going on well, that her sister had returned and was nursing her with care and

devotion, that she had an excellent doctor, and all possible was being done for her. He said that the journey had caused a relapse, but that if everything went smoothly now, her complete recovery was only a matter of time.

Arrived at Noisy-le-Sec, de Gaurival made up his mind to risk a few hours in Paris. It was quite impossible to obtain leave, though all the men of the new detachment were positive they could not start for Toulon for another forty-eight hours. Once in Paris, it would be unheard-of bad luck if he were stopped and asked for his papers; but to get there was a different matter, the supervision being extremely severe. He managed it, however, and found himself free and in the whirl of the Rue Magenta.

He had said to himself a hundred times that he should not try to see Isabelle, and that all he wanted in Paris was to make some purchases and to say good-bye to friends. Yet the first empty taxi he saw he hailed, and found himself nearing the Rue du Bouclier before he was aware that he had given the address.

He remembered how many times Isabelle had tried to persuade him to come and see the flat during their week together in Paris in the spring. She had wanted to show him her room, and how she had surrounded herself with all the little treasures he had given her or that she had bought when they had been together, and which all marked an epoch in their romance. But he had never consented, saying that he refused to put his foot across any threshold which was connected with the life of her family; that he wanted her for himself, separated entirely from the rest of the world, or not at all. He knew the house well

enough, and also her bedroom windows. He found himself gazing up at them. One was a little open.

But now !—what was the use of going to see her ? What could they say to each other ? Perhaps Isabelle was still unable to talk, was still so weak that she could not take in what he said to her. But he could look at her; they could gaze into each other's eyes. Was it worth while to harrow the feelings of both for that satisfaction ? He, who hated good-byes, was he going to submit to one voluntarily ?

He turned on his heel and walked rapidly back to the spot where the taxi was standing. Before the chauffeur could start, however, he had sprung out again, and muttering something unintelligible, he retraced his steps. He must see her—she might die, or he, for the matter of that. Why should they be denied a last look ? The concierge could give no news of the patient, but thought that her sister, Mrs. Hamilton, was out. At least, then, he would be saved introducing himself and giving explanations. He had not the head nor the heart for dissimulation.

The servant who opened the door replied that the patient had had a fairly good night, that Mrs. Hamilton was indeed out, but that she would ask the nurse to come and speak to him.

De Gaurival gave his card, and she ushered him into a little sitting-room.

Those five minutes of waiting seemed like five hours. At last a tall, fair-haired English nurse came gliding noiselessly into the room.

De Gaurival said he had taken the liberty of calling to ask for news of her patient, as she was a great friend of his. When the nurse had given him a few details of her illness de Gaurival asked:

"Is she allowed to see visitors?"

"She has seen nobody yet, but I dare say in a few days it will be possible."

"Does she know I am here? Did she see my card?"

"She is dozing just now. When she wakes, I will tell her you have been."

"I am leaving France in a few hours, and should be very glad if you would tell her I am here. I think she would be very disappointed to hear I had been and she did not see me."

"I don't think it's possible to let you in before asking the doctor or her sister. I can't take the responsibility."

"There is no need to talk. I only just want to say good-bye."

"I will go and see how she is feeling just now."

The nurse returned almost immediately.

"I'm afraid——"

"Does she know I'm here?" de Gaurival interrupted.

"No, she's dozing now. If you could come a little later——"

"Very well, very well; later, later."

De Gaurival looked round for his *képi* and literally tore from the house. Why had he argued so long with that cold, calm, fair-haired creature who had no conception of love or passion? "A little later!" He would *never* go back! All was over! Why had he not taken the law into his own hands and simply pushed past into the sick-room? They would have seen each other, their eyes would have met, they could have had that last satisfaction. Then he would have disappeared again before the nurse had realized what had happened. Instead of that he had pleaded like a schoolboy. He had lacked decision. It had been

against his principles to enter the house, but once there, it was folly to have been thwarted by a girl who understood nothing of life.

He directed the chauffeur straight back to the station. As he waited for his train, all his thoughts were of Isabelle. What will she say when she knows I have been ? She will be looking out for me all day, as I said I would return. Oh no, she knows me well enough not to expect me. She will realize what it cost me to go to her there under her sister's roof, and she can never be so foolish as to hope to see me back a second time when I failed so ignominiously the first.

He stumbled into a third-class carriage crowded with soldiers smoking and spitting. His thoughts ran on again and became more and more bitter. All is over ! I shall never see her again. Even if she were to recover quickly she would never come to Salonika. My life is finished, for what is life when love and passion pass away ? Other women have gone in and out of my life. Why should not this be one among many episodes ? But it is not, and I am sick of intrigues. Marriage is all that is left for me, and I shall never marry now. Isabelle, mon adorée, how can I think of our love as something past and over ? I must imagine it as a past which will some day be renewed, or I cannot bear it ! If only I was an aviator who could in a single hour risk death or glory ? How gladly would I risk my life now ! If only something requiring heroism were asked of me !—but I am only part of a machine which grinds amidst dust and mud.

He looked round at his companions, who were jostling him and each other as they shouldered their packs preparatory to leaving the train. One or two addressed him with kindly intention, for, noticing

his eyes staring into space, they thought he was perhaps passing his destination. De Gaurival turned on them so sternly that they regretted their interference. He was still harping on the old string: And poor little Isabelle! What will she say when she hears I have left France? Who knows? She will cry a little, she will write me one or two piteous letters, and then she will feel a certain relief that I am out of the way and no longer calling her from the sheltered roof of her family. I feel, I know, that all is over!

Rejoining his group at Noisy-le-Sec, he found that his absence had not been noticed, and the next morning he started with his detachment for Toulon. The seemingly endless train journey over, they went on board a transport, and his life as a soldier on the Western Front was ended.

CHAPTER XIX

TWO LETTERS

" 15, Rue du Bouclier,
" Paris,
" *September* 12, 1916.

" Dear Gauri,

" I received your letter from Salonika yesterday. I was glad to know that you had arrived safely. Your last note from Toulon was by my bed three days before I was able to open and read it. From the postmark on the envelope the truth was forced upon me that I should not see you again. How I suffered! I did not want to know details, I did not want to think about you.

" What shall I say to you, Gauri? What is the use of words? I sometimes wrote to you impassioned letters, Gauri, but then I wanted this or that, and I was ready to risk life, reputation, the happiness of others, so ardently did I desire things. I think I still desire things, but with all the strength of my body gone I can struggle no longer. I submit to fate. You will answer, ' You are quite right,' meaning that if I have ceased to care for you, I am perfectly justified in directing my life into other channels. Not for a minute dare I hope that you will tell me to get first quite well, to be patient and brave, and that you yourself will have patience. If only you would say all that to me! Do not be cruel, Gauri. Why can't we be friends? If not lovers, why not friends? But

we were not friends while we were lovers, so how can I expect that we shall be friends when separated by hundreds and hundreds of miles? And yet, when I think of all the perseverance and ingenuity we both showed in order to meet, of the risks we ran and the discomforts we endured to be together, it does not seem possible that we were not friends. We had moments of such triumph when our efforts were successful.

"If you are convinced (and it cannot be otherwise) that for all these months my thoughts have had one object, my desires one aim, you will surely find excuses for me if this time I cannot make an effort to join you. Look backward, Gauri, and you will be kind and understand. I have given you innumerable proofs. No words that I can write can be of any use when you have these proofs before you.

"All this is to prepare you for something I must now tell you, though it breaks my heart, and you will construe my motives (or pretend to construe them) falsely.

"When I had come to the conclusion that I should be too weak and ill to follow you to Salonika, I consented to join my husband in Washington. Ever since I was brought to Paris ill, he has been telegraphing to my brother-in-law, to my sister, to me, urging that I should cross over. I refused and refused, hoping against hope that I should get better, that I should feel capable of fresh effort, that I could come to Salonika. But I now feel convinced, not only from what others say, but from my own feelings, that I shall not be strong for some time. And to undertake the journey to Salonika, I must not only be strong in body, but I must have all my wits about me.

When I came to you at the front, the risk of being sent back only meant inconvenience and the disappointment of not seeing you. But to be sent back from Salonika, or perhaps not even allowed to land, would be much more serious. Think of another voyage of six days straight on end, the dangers of the Mediterranean run twice in vain; or worse still, all the complications that might ensue if I were taken for a spy. Who out there could come to my rescue or vouch for my good faith? And then the idea of starting off alone so terrified me that I wanted to die rather than think about it any more. Some nights my high temperature was, I am sure, only due to my thoughts. When I gave up the hope of following you, I was calmer for a little while; and then came the horror of being alone in Paris. My sister returns to England at the end of the month, and I had the choice of going with her, joining my husband, or remaining alone here. And what should I have done alone in Paris without the slightest chance of you coming to see me or me to see you? If I had only thought of myself, I might have managed to pull through somehow; but you would never have consented to such a course.

"When you were in France and I was expecting you at any time, you sent me back to England, so how would you allow me to remain alone indefinitely while you were so far away? It would even have poisoned our life when we came together again.

"I could not go to England. Nobody wanted me. They all took it for granted that I should join my husband as soon as he telegraphed for me. They were evidently growing uneasy at our long separation, and thought I should be as relieved as they were at

his sending for me. So at last, not knowing what else to do, I was persuaded to go to Washington. My sister inquired among her friends, and managed to find somebody who would look after me during the voyage across the Atlantic; the tickets were taken; my husband sent telegrams confirming all arrangements, and to my despair everything fitted itself in without a hitch. And now, if all goes as it has been arranged, I leave for Bordeaux on the 20th, and embark the same night on the *Espagne*. There are moments when I am mad to throw over all these carefully made plans, but lassitude overtakes me again, and I give a silent consent. My only hope now is that circumstances themselves will prevent me starting, that the Atlantic will again be too dangerous, that I shall have a relapse, that the people with whom I am to travel will leave me in the lurch.

"Oh, Gauri! Gauri! if we could be friends as well as lovers, perhaps we could arrange something; but I know that you will not advise me. You have always left all responsibility, all decisions with me. I did not mind that till now. I have always had the absolute conviction without the shadow of a doubt that you needed and desired me, and that was enough. But now things are altered. I am not myself. My brain is also weak; I expect you can see that from this muddly letter.

"If only I could have seen you when you came here, if we could have talked for five minutes! I have not yet told you of those awful days when I found you had come and gone, and that my last hope of saying good-bye to you had vanished.

"I was only given your card at midday. It is impossible to tell you what I felt when I found you

had been within a few yards of me and that I had not seen you. I nearly went mad. I was in despair at having missed you, and terrified you should not come again. Of course Nurse Felix tried to calm me, and said you had promised to return later. I was sure you would not come back, and I forced them to give me a pen and take a note to the Travellers' Club. At first my sister tried to soothe me and begged me to remain quiet, and said I should write the next day; but when she saw my agony of mind, she did all she could to expedite matters. I only wrote, 'Come quickly.' The note came back saying that you had not been seen there for several months. Then I knew that you must have left Paris again.

"After that, I had a sort of collapse, and the doctor was in and out for some twenty-four hours. I don't know if I talked during that time or what I said, and at first, when I began to get better again, I dreaded being asked questions; but nobody has ever mentioned that time.

"But you can imagine my despair. That you should have come to Paris and to the flat, and that I should not have seen you. It was not an ordinary meeting we had missed, and which could be compensated for by another. It was our last chance of saying good-bye. And I had come back from death for this tragedy! I do not know whether Nurse Felix told you, but I nearly died during these first days in my sister's house. Of course I guessed I was very ill and felt I might die, but I never knew that everybody round me was doubtful of saving me.

"Sometimes I wish I had died. I feel so tired, so hopeless. I try to say to myself that life is worth living for the memory of those days and weeks spent

together; and at other times that if, on the contrary, I could stifle memories, I could still enjoy life. In spite of my decision to join my husband, I sometimes feel that my only chance of happiness in the future would be to think that all is not over between us, to believe that circumstances will not always separate us, and that one day, if we have patience to wait for it, we shall get those three months together we have promised ourselves.

"Oh, those three months in privacy and comfort! Three months without risk of punishment for you or scandal for me! Three months of liberty, freedom, to go where we will, to do what we like! Those first three months after peace is declared were to have been ours. When this nightmare of war lifted from the soul of everybody living, then our time had come! I always said that these secret meetings in the army zone were preliminaries only to the great event that we were looking forward to, and that rather than compromise it I would have gone without them altogether. And now I am sealing my fate. Those months will never be ours.

"If I had seen you to say good-bye, perhaps you might have persuaded me differently; but you never persuade me, and I must therefore judge you by what I know of you. Oh, Gauri, why did the fates not allow us even to say good-bye? You have always made our farewells short and stern, even if you have not avoided them altogether; but you did not want to avoid this one, for you came to the house. I would have given everything in the world to have seen you again.

"I do not suppose you will answer this letter, nor forgive me for this decision; yet I do not believe you

could propose any other course to me. Oh, Gauri, I ask you in spite of all, ' Pensez à moi avec douceur.' You used to say that to me, now I say it to you. If you do, you will be able to understand. I know you will say at first, ' She has deserted me. I will thrust her out of my life; I will never think of her again '; but if you give yourself time to reflect, if you will read this rambling letter in the spirit in which it is written, the past can still have something beautiful—it need not be only bitter. Do not make things harder for yourself, more difficult to bear than they are already. You are hard, Gauri; I loved even your hardness, because it seemed to me to make you more virile, and I was attracted by it as by all your qualities and faults. But you can be gentle too, and never could woman have greater proof of man's gentleness than I had of yours during this illness. Things come back to me now of what you did and what you said, though at the time perhaps I hardly realized what was happening.

" Let me also say this in my favour: that in a way I risked my life twice to be by your side.

" When I crossed the Irish Channel the last time I came to see you, all passengers of the *Cordelia* were told that unless their business was absolutely necessary, they were advised to leave the boat and remain in Ireland. Such unsolicited advice would have made me turn back if it had not been you I was going to see. I do not know if there was any very real danger, but at any rate I thought there was. It did not deter me for a second. I never told you this, because I hate heroics. Then I nearly died of this illness, so I risked my life a second time. Of course at Auvillers I did not know what I was risking, but it was true all the

same. Oh, Gauri, let these two facts stand for something, and prove to you that while I was yours I loved you entirely and you only.

"I thought that circumstances could never be stronger than our love, and even now they need not have been, if we could have settled our programme together instead of the decision resting with me alone. Follow you or give you up—there was no other alternative with you—I knew it.

"Even if you do not write to me, I would like to continue to write to you. A soldier is so glad of letters, and you will want to know about my convalescence and recovery.

"You will say you do not want my letters if you cannot have me, yet they might be our food, and though it is starvation diet, keep us alive till this war is over.

"I thank you, Gauri, for your care of me during this illness. I don't think I ever thanked you, even when I left Auvillers. What an awful time you must have had, too.

"But what I thank you most for is for making me live. If I had not met you, I consider I should never have lived. I should never have realized that I existed. I have experienced through you the heights of happiness and the depths of misery. For all you have given me, for all you have made me feel, I thank you.

"Just now I only aspire to rest. I am so tired, my feelings are numbed, my brain is as weak as my body. You know that I cannot sit up in bed without help yet.

"I ought not to have written you such a long letter, and I expect it is illogical. You always say I write

contrary things. But I am sincere all the same, and if you will try you will understand me, and things will be less hard to bear for both of us.

"I got ill in coming to see you, Gauri. Remember that, and do not be hard on me. 'Pensez à moi avec douceur.' Your 'amie mince et blonde' asks you this above all else. Let the past have a sweet and not a bitter memory. Your soldier's life out there will be more interesting than in France, perhaps. I hope so; and at any rate, to see a new country, new people, a new front, cannot fail to distract you.

"Good-bye, my soldier, my Gauri. Good-bye.

"Yours,

"ISABELLE."

"T.M., 1407,
"SECTEUR 501,
"*September* 18, 1916.

"CHÈRE AMIE,

"Your letter of September 12 only reached me this morning, and I am terribly afraid you may have left France before you can receive my answer. I curse myself for not having written all this time—not a day has passed but I have seated myself with pen and paper, and yet the words begging you for news, imploring you not to forget me, would not come.

"And now perhaps it is too late. But I must speak, even though it may be in vain. I am now like a drowning man catching at a straw after repeatedly refusing the help which would have brought him safely to shore.

"This is what I have to say. If you have not already left Paris, I pray you on my knees to stay

there and wait for my return. I swear to you that I will conquer my devilish jealousy, and that no word of doubt or suspicion shall ever cross my lips when we meet again. The picture of your waiting for me shall be my only vision, and the remembrance of your devotion and the sacrifices you made to join me, shall so impregnate my being that no other thought than gratitude can enter my soul.

"I do not ask you to follow me here—besides, I am not in Salonika itself, and could rarely see you. Remain in Paris while you are regaining your strength, stay at your sister's flat, and wait for me patiently. Our time—the time you speak of—shall come.

"I fear your family—I fear that your sister's care in your illness may have carried you back into your childhood and strengthened family ties. Till now I was jealous of the air you breathed, of the ground you stood on, of the persons and things you saw; but at this present time I feel I was mad and did not recognize the real danger. What I suffered then was nothing to the agonizing fear which fills me now, lest you should become absorbed in your family and family traditions. If childhood's dreams, sentiments, and aspirations take hold of you now, they will estrange you from me. Dreams of childhood are only dreams, and can only remain dreams—I, and I only, am a reality.

"Isabelle, I love you—I have always loved you! You know this more certainly than if I had repeated it a thousand times. I have tortured you, but have tortured myself more. The very fact that I openly acknowledge all my feelings, now when it may be useless, must prove to you that my cure has begun.

I swear to you that I will so school myself during this exile that you shall never suffer again through me—that the lover who returns to you shall be the same, and yet so gentle, that by his side you shall never have a minute's pain or sorrow. My love was absolute, but this time it shall shield and protect you from every breath of outside worry. How I will try and make up for my cruelty in the past! Say it is not too late, and that you still belong to me. Remember always that it was the cruelty of passionate love, and you can forgive.

"Isabelle, *mon adorée*, I cannot but believe you will have waited to hear from me before leaving France; I cannot but believe you will do as I ask you if this letter arrives in time. If, however, it only reaches you in Washington, if all is too late, then do not write to me. You know me well enough to be convinced that, if you have already rejoined your husband you are no longer mine, and I never want to see you nor hear from you again.

"But it is not true. You could not have done it. My passionate desire even from here must have inspired you to wait for me. Do you think that anything on earth could compensate you for the loss of my love? And I tell you again that this time, though as strong as before, it shall be all sweetness, and with all the hardness and cruelty gone out of it. You have never yet tasted all the sweetness of love; I kept it back, held myself in. I tried to take more than I gave. And now I want you again in order to give—to give you something you have not yet had, something that a devil in my nature made me withhold. I have deprived you of something, and it is that which hurts me now; but if we meet again it shall

be yours a thousand times. I love you, Isabelle! I love you, my darling! Wait for me, and if it be weeks or months, you shall never regret it. Write quickly.

"Yours,
"GAURI."

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